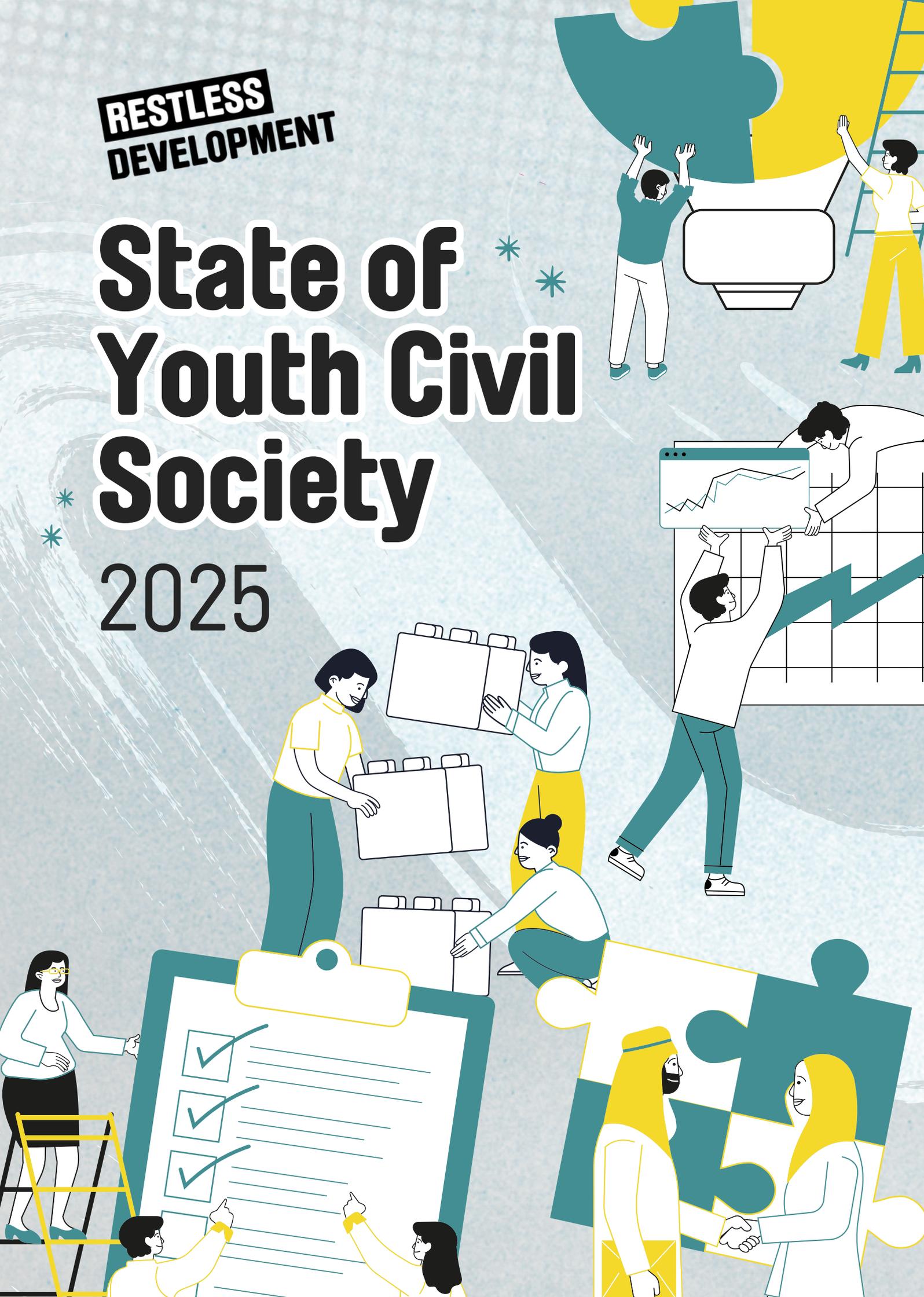RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT

State of Youth Civil Society

2025

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

Movement Building

Authored by Maria Malomalo & Designed by Abigail Amon

"A movement is a group of people who have a collective idea that is disruptive, challenging the status quo…"

Introduction

Movements have historically been at the forefront of driving change, serving as powerful vehicles for mobilising young people to challenge the status quo and reimagine more just and equitable societies. From #BringBackOurGirls and #EndSARS in Nigeria, to Black Lives Matter in the United States, #NotTooYoungToRun in Kenya, #FeesMustFall in South Africa, and the global #MeToo, movements have played a vital role in amplifying silenced voices and elevating urgent community demands.

They significantly differ from non-profit organisations, arising from shared grievances and a collective vision for justice. Often, they do not require offices, registration, or formal leadership structures to function; instead, they are organic, people-driven and created by individuals and groups who believe that change is possible. Movements are fluid, adaptable, and prioritise collective ownership.

"A movement is a group of people who have a collective idea that is disruptive, challenging the status quo…"
Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

Characteristics of movements

1. Context-driven leadership structure

Depending on the operating context, movements adopt either horizontal or vertical leadership structures. In authoritarian or repressive environments, loose and flat hierarchies become strategic tools for survival. The absence of rigid leadership frameworks helps movements avoid state surveillance and co-option. Instead, coordination is often managed through temporary, needs-based committees such as mobilisation, communications, coordination, and finance. Individual young people and those representing various like-minded organisations contribute resources, time, and expertise.

"Committees were formed in response to a particular need… made up of existing youth organisations which forwarded representatives into the movement."
Movement Leader, Nigeria

"We had many volunteers… young people who brought their different expertise to the movement."
Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

In contexts where vertical leadership is applied, the model minimises reliance on a single influential leader, instead emphasising the distribution of power across different levels within the hierarchy.

2. Decision-making is quick and collective

Young organisers emphasised that, in the absence of formal titles and rigid roles, decision-making becomes more collective, transparent, and responsive. Instead of waiting for approval from a central authority, members can act based on real-time needs, guided by shared principles and trust-based collaboration.

"Decision-making is prompt—no red tape or bureaucracy. There is collective leadership, democratic leadership."
Movement Leader, Nigeria

3. Intersectional approach to leadership

A 'leaderless' structure creates space for a more inclusive approach to participation. Young people from diverse backgrounds, who are often excluded from leadership due to factors like gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, or education, are more likely to feel that their contributions matter. In many cases, coordination is task-driven and emergent: people step forward where their skills and energy are best utilised, and leadership is about action, not authority.

However, this flexibility is not without its tensions. Some movements have struggled with the absence of defined leadership. Reflecting on their own experience, one leader highlighted that their movement faced challenges because it lacked clear, accountable leadership roles.

"We failed by being leaderless. Even the liberation movement had leaders."
Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

They further highlighted that accountability and collective decision-making can be integrated within the vertical leadership style, ensuring both collective and individual leadership.

4. New media technologies are equalisers

New media technologies have been an equalising force for youth-led movements. Strategic use of social media platforms, especially during peak public frustrations, allows for rapid mobilisation. Hashtags, real-time videos, memes, and symbolic dressing (for example, red bandanas for period poverty) create powerful visual narratives.

"We occupied X (formerly Twitter) in a way that everyone was saying no to the Finance Bill... trending globally for four consecutive days."
Movement Leader, Kenya

5. Tactics must be agile

Movements do not rely on one form of action or intervention; they know that what worked last year may not work again. Some movements intentionally end after achieving their goals, understanding that longevity is not always the measure of success.

6. People-Driven

The foundation of any movement is people – their stories, their energy, their solidarity. Movements are sustained by a clear "why": a collective vision of what needs to be built or dismantled. From health professionals offering services, to religious institutions offering space, to diaspora communities sending funds, movements rely on shared commitment more than formal resources.

"Some gave USD 1, others USD 1,000. Even parents gave money. Matatu drivers gave free transport."
Movement Leader, Kenya

7. Rooted in self-reliance and community trust

Movements' resourcing strategies are rooted in self-reliance and community trust. Initial funding often comes from the movement members themselves. In some cases, transparent trust funds are created. As visibility increases, support may grow, but so does the risk of donor interference.

"The money became the problem. Donors joined the gravy train... We had to tailor-make what happened into their template."
Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

This reflects a critical tension: movements need resources, but funding must not compromise autonomy. Institutionalisation can dilute political clarity and spontaneity. Movements call for alternative funding approaches that honour grassroots leadership and reflect local economic realities, particularly in contexts where young people are navigating poverty and structural debt.

8. Documentation is the key

Documentation plays a crucial role in sustaining a movement's narrative and memory, especially in patriarchal or oppressive systems that erase contributions by women and marginalised communities.

"As a woman, you are 90% erased."
Movement Leader, Nigeria

Clear communication, transparent resourcing, and storytelling strengthen credibility and accountability. Movements insist on documenting their processes and victories to preserve history and claim their place in the public record.

9. Success is measured by the community

When it comes to success, movements do not rely on donor reports or metrics alone. Impact is measured by social and political shifts, laws withdrawn, communities mobilised, and mindsets changed.

"Articulate what you are going out for. What is the minimum we want to come home with?"
Movement Leader, Nigeria

Examples of success include:
- Withdrawal of oppressive finance bills
- MPs voting against their parties in solidarity with communities
- Local communities calling on movement leaders to intervene
- A generation remembering the campaign's name and purpose

"Anyone who was 18 years and above from 2016 onwards will give you a summary of what that movement was."
Movement Leader, Nigeria

This is the legacy of movement–building, when political action becomes cultural memory.

What Young People Need to Know...

Start Small – Claim Early Wins

Begin with tangible, visible actions rooted in local realities. Early victories—no matter how modest—build confidence, credibility, and collective energy.

> "Action brings impact, and when there is impact, there is an audience."
>
> Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

Define a Clear Purpose and Shared Objectives

Anchor your movement in the lived experiences of your community. Be specific about what you stand for and who you serve. Clarity ensures relevance and prevents duplication.

Understand the Ecosystem – Map the Terrain

You are not alone. Map out who is doing what in your area. Understand where your efforts complement others and identify opportunities for collaboration, not competition.

Build a Collective Identity

Create a shared sense of belonging through symbols, language, or rituals. Movements thrive when people feel emotionally and ideologically connected.

Define Core Issues Strategically

Be specific and intersectional. Identify the structural issues that matter most and use them to shape your narrative, demands, and alliances.

Foster Inclusive Leadership, Not Personality Politics

Avoid movements that revolve around individuals or cliques. Promote leadership as service, not status. Make space for diverse voices and collective decision-making.

> "Everyone wants to lead and bring their own thinking, but we must allow others to lead us too."

What Young People Need to Know…

Encourage Shared Leadership and Trust the Process

Let leadership emerge naturally, but clarify roles and responsibilities. Shared leadership is not chaos—it's democratic, trust-based, and adaptable.

Stay Dynamic and Open to Support

Remain responsive to change. Build partnerships across generations and sectors. Create regular spaces for reflection and learning.

Gather Knowledge – Know What You Need

Educate yourself continuously. Understand the systems you're disrupting and what resources (skills, tools, networks) you need to sustain the work.

Centre Community and Collaboration

Movements are built together. Celebrate the people you've worked with and give credit where it's due. Erasure has no place in collective liberation.

Build and Protect Credibility

Be transparent, consistent, and accountable. People support movements they trust—especially when you show commitment beyond platforms and donors.

Take Care of Yourself and Each Other

Activism is emotional and exhausting. Prioritise rest, healing, and care as part of your strategy. A burnt-out movement cannot sustain change.

"There is no better time for social movements to emerge and grow."

Movement Leader, Zimbabwe

But they must be rooted in strategy, collective care, and radical hope.

"Occupy Parliament"

– A Feminist, Youth-Led Movement in Kenya (2024)

Background & Context

In 2024, the Kenyan government introduced a Finance Bill in Parliament, sparking one of the most significant feminist and youth-led movements in the country's recent history. Presented as a response to economic instability, particularly to meet the USD30.5 billion 2024/25 budget, the bill enacted new taxes on digital content creation, menstrual products, transport, and everyday goods, further burdening already economically strained youth, women, and traditionally marginalised groups.

Activists widely regarded the bill as punitive and indifferent to the needs and lived realities of young people, with no corresponding creation of jobs or public accountability. What followed the bill's tabling was a coordinated, spontaneous, and feminist-informed movement rooted in economic justice, digital organising, mutual aid, and civic resistance.

Adopting a Hierarchical Structure

The movement was described as hierarchical, defying the vertical form of leadership. Coordination occurred through spontaneous committees based on people's skills, such as mobilisation, finance, communication and safety, which allowed the movement to move quickly, with no bureaucratic delays.

> "We didn't have defined leaders, more of people reasoning together."
> **Youth Leader**

This flat structure enhanced trust and ownership, especially among marginalised groups often sidelined in mainstream organising. The feminist ethos, shared decision-making, inclusive participation, and care, underpinned its operations.

The Role of Creativity & Digital Organising

The movement's strength lay in its agility and creativity. Faced with a government ready to use force, activists responded quickly. Tactics ranged from avoiding police through backstreets ("hide and seek") to impactful visual and symbolic resistance. Red bandanas highlighted period poverty, while branded T-shirts, placards, cartoons, and social media graphics amplified outrage.

> "We occupied X in a way that everyone was saying no to the Finance Bill... trending globally for four consecutive days."
> **Youth Leader**

Influencers, engineers, teachers, and students all came together under shared hashtags across platforms. Messaging was tailored for Gen Z and Gen Alpha audiences through TikTok, memes, and short videos, maintaining energy and accessibility. This aesthetic of resistance, rooted in feminist visual culture, fostered emotional connection and turned the protests into community spaces of expression, safety, and defiance.

Participation and Solidarity: Community Philanthropy in Action

At its height, the movement engaged widespread participation across social classes, regions, and professions. Solidarity networks quickly mobilised. Legal aid, food, healthcare, and even transportation were freely provided by compassionate professionals, families, and faith institutions. A community trust fund was set up, with audited accountability, to support protesters injured by police and manage logistics.

> "Financially, the resources came from us... even our own parents gave money. Matatu (motorbike) drivers gave free transport. Mosques gave space. Doctors joined. It was natural."
> **Youth Leader**

Women and queer activists played a crucial role in organising safe spaces, distributing information, and managing care logistics. Their labour sustained the movement. This feminist practice of mutual care as resistance provided the protests with longevity and moral legitimacy that state structures failed to undermine.

Achievements and Impact

Although 204 Members of Parliament (MPs) voted for the bill and 115 voted against, the movement achieved its core objective: Kenya's President, William Ruto, revoked the Finance Bill.

The movement's wins included:
- Rejection of the Finance Bill.
- Wide public education on taxation, debt, and youth livelihoods.
- Intergenerational solidarity
- Elevated feminist and youth voices in national economic discourse
- A new political consciousness among young Kenyans

Notably, the movement's intentional documentation of abuses, protests, and victories ensured its story could not be erased.

Reflections: The Feminist Power of Knowing When to Leave

This movement also taught a rare lesson: knowing when to step back. After reaching its immediate goal, the core organisers did not attempt to institutionalise or maintain the momentum for its own sake. Instead, they recognised that the political landscape had shifted, and new strategies would be necessary.

Instead of chasing funding or creating a fixed organisation, they maintained the spirit of movement-building, rooted in purpose rather than permanence. This feminist ethic of impermanence and fluidity helped prevent burnout and co-option.

Key Lessons for Youth Civil Society

- Movements do not require formal structures to be effective. Trust, decentralised coordination, and shared purpose can propel national change.
- Feminist values, care, inclusivity, and collective leadership strengthen organisation. They build movements that nurture rather than drain.
- Digital tactics can be highly political. When rooted in lived experiences and cultural expression, they rally across divides.
- Strategy should not be driven by funding. Movements flourish through mutual aid, volunteerism, and solidarity, not log frames.
- Success isn't always about longevity. Sometimes, the most strategic move is to step back and regroup.

Conclusion

The 'Occupy Parliament' movement against the Finance Bill in Kenya stands as a landmark example of youth-led, feminist organising in action. It reminded a nation and the world of the power of young people as power shifters, disruptors, dreamers, and defenders of justice. Rooted in community, driven by rage and care, and free from institutional capture, this was a strong assertion of people over profit, and dignity over debt.

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…

Involve the Community 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.

RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT

Impact Investment

Authored by Dr. Souvik Pyne & Designed by Abigail Amon

For today's youth, understanding impact investing is not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for navigating and shaping tomorrow's economy.

Introduction

The global funding landscape for youth organisations is shrinking, leading to immediate and serious consequences. Cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) from traditional donors have disproportionately impacted youth civil society in the Majority World. At the same time, young people are increasingly conscious of their role in addressing global challenges; traditional funding mechanisms often fall short of bridging the gap between profit and purpose.

That's where impact investing comes in. It's a new way of using money to do good and make a profit. Instead of only giving grants, impact investors put their money into projects or businesses that make a positive difference, like protecting the planet or creating jobs, while also earning some financial return.

For young changemakers, understanding impact investing isn't just "nice to know." It's a key skill for building sustainable projects and influencing how the future economy works.

But there's something to think about. Impact investing treats change like an investment, focusing on value-creation, while rights-based approaches focus on governments' duty to provide services and protect people. Both matter. The challenge is to find a balance, making sure that new funding models enhance the agency of young people without replacing the responsibility of governments to deliver on rights.

What It Is

Impact investing started from the idea of socially responsible investing, which focused on avoiding specific industries for ethical or religious reasons. Over time, investors began to actively support positive social and environmental causes, such as civil rights, the fight against apartheid, and sustainability.

This shift introduced the idea of the "triple bottom line"– focusing on people, planet, and profit together. Impact investments are defined as investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social or environmental impact alongside a financial return. There are four key characteristics:

1. Intentionality

Impact investing means choosing to invest in a way that purposely helps people or the planet. These investors are trying to fix problems or make positive changes, not just make money. This clear goal sets them apart from other investors who might care about impact but don't make it their main focus.

2. Use of Evidence and Impact Data in Investment Design

Impact investments should be based on facts and data, not just guesses or gut feelings. Using good information helps investors design smart investments that can really make a difference.

3. Management of Impact Performance

Since impact investors have a clear goal to create positive change, they need to track their progress and adjust as needed. This means having systems to measure results and sharing updates, so everyone involved can work better toward the intended impact.

4. Contribution to the Growth of the Sector

Good impact investors use common language and tools to explain what they are doing and how well it's working. They also share what they learn, so others can improve and more people can invest in ways that help society and the environment.

What motivates investors?

1. A desire to create positive social impact

Many impact investors are motivated by a deep commitment to helping young people thrive. They want to reduce youth unemployment, improve education, or support mental health.

Example:
The Tony Elumelu Foundation has committed $100 million since 2010 to support young African entrepreneurs, fueling the creation of 400,000 jobs and generating over $2.3 billion in revenue. Their programmes, like the Green Entrepreneurship Program, also aim to combat climate change while fostering economic opportunity.

2. Combining a financial return with social alignment

Investors want to earn financial returns while also making a difference in people's lives. Youth-focused initiatives can offer strong returns when they tap into growing sectors like education technology or workforce development.

Example:
Owl Ventures, a venture capital firm specialising in education technology, has backed platforms like Quizlet, helping underserved students study more effectively while delivering financial returns.

3. Innovation and market opportunity

Young people are early adopters of technology, and investing in youth-oriented services and products opens up fast-growing markets.

Example:
Lumos, a growth-equity impact investor, led an $80-million Series C round in OpenClassrooms, a global digital education-to-employment platform that targets underserved learners with apprenticeships and job support.

4. Responding to stakeholder and consumer pressure

Companies and institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate social responsibility – especially toward future generations.

Example:
Texas Pacific Group's "The Rise Fund" invested in youth development areas like education and workforce readiness in response to growing pressure from stakeholders, especially socially conscious Millennials and Gen Z, to address issues linked to racial and social equity.

5. Improving reputation and branding

Impact investing can enhance an investor's public image, especially when targeting causes with broad appeal.

Example:
Better Society Capital in the UK has invested over £1 billion in social impact-including youth support projects, boosting its reputation in outcome-driven philanthropy and investment.

What Young People Need to Know…

Young people are often left out of funding opportunities, especially when it comes to newer or less traditional types of funding. It is helpful for young people to learn how impact investing works, including its benefits and risks, so they can make informed choices about accessing opportunities.

Opportunities of Impact Investing
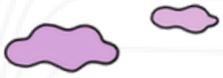
More Funding Options

Impact investing brings in private money, helping youth programs get resources that governments or traditional donors might not provide.

Supports Growth and Innovation

It makes it easier to scale programs and try out new, creative approaches compared to traditional funding.

Focus on Results

It encourages programs to be results-driven, with clear goals and accountability.

Shared Values and Long-Term Impact

It seeks social good while promoting sustainability, reducing dependence on donors, and helping programs become self-sustaining.
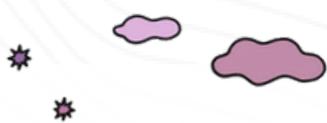
Potential Challenges of Impact Investing

Conflict between Social Goals and Financial Returns

Focusing too much on measurable returns, including profits, can undermine inclusion and equity, which often take more time and resources and may show lower immediate results. This can cause programs to drift away from their original mission.

Reliance on Market Logic

Youth development often involves complex, long-term work that doesn't always fit a business-style focus on cost-efficiency, quick results, and easy scalability.

Limits of Measurement

Emphasising short-term, measurable results may overlook deeper, transformative impacts and can even lead to "impact washing"– making things look effective without real change.

Power Imbalances

Young people and target communities often have little say in decision-making compared to investors.
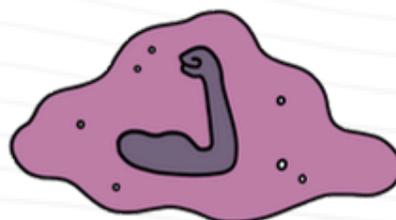
Where Do Young People Start?

Young people and youth-focused organisations can take a proactive approach by following certain principles and strategies when exploring impact investing for funding. At the same time, they can encourage investors to adopt these good practices, helping make impact investing more effective and responsible for everyone involved.

1. Make sure youth voices lead the way

When exploring impact investing, young people shouldn't just be invited to the table; they should help set the agenda. Push for the creation of or join Youth Advisory Councils or Youth Boards to make sure decisions reflect your realities, priorities, and ideas.

2. Redefine what success means

Work with the investors, other young people and communities to decide what real change looks like, not just numbers, but stories, relationships, and lived experiences. Mix both data and community insights to track progress that truly matters to you.

3. Engage investors with mission and lived experiences

Share your organisation's mission and purpose to inspire investors. Let young people share their own experiences in pitches, making the story more authentic and relatable.

4. Prioritise equity and inclusion

We all know that young people are diverse, so focus on including those most in need. Applying an equity lens ensures social justice is upheld and reduces the risk of superficial impact.

5. Transparent reporting to youth and community

Beyond reporting to investors, think about providing updates in youth-friendly ways, using social media, community meetings, surveys, or zines so young people can see progress and provide feedback.

6. Use blended financing strategies

See if you can combine impact investing with other funding sources like grants, government support, or community fundraising. This creates flexibility and opens up more resources.

Types of impact investment

Type	Description
Venture Capital or Private Equity	This means giving money to new or growing businesses that have a social purpose, helping them start, grow, and make a positive difference while earning profits.
Venture Philanthropy	This means providing money and practical support, such as mentoring, training, or advice, to help organisations grow and make a greater social impact.
Debt or Fixed Income Investing	This means lending money to a social enterprise or government to help achieve a positive goal. The investor owns the initiative. The money is later paid back with some interest, and the investor supports the project's success.
Social Enterprise Lending	This means giving low–interest loans to businesses that aim to create social change. The investor doesn't own the business but helps it grow by offering affordable financing.
Social Impact Bonds	Investors pay for a social project upfront, and the government pays them back only if the project succeeds and meets its goals.
Development Impact Bonds	Investors fund a project, and private donors or foundations pay them back only if the project achieves its goals.

RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT

Powershifting in Impact Measurement

Authored by Sharon Manenji and Dennis Mwesigwa
Designed by Abigail Amon

"By making evaluations and impact measurement techniques flexible, inclusive, and driven by those most affected, we get a more honest and powerful picture of what's working and what needs to change."
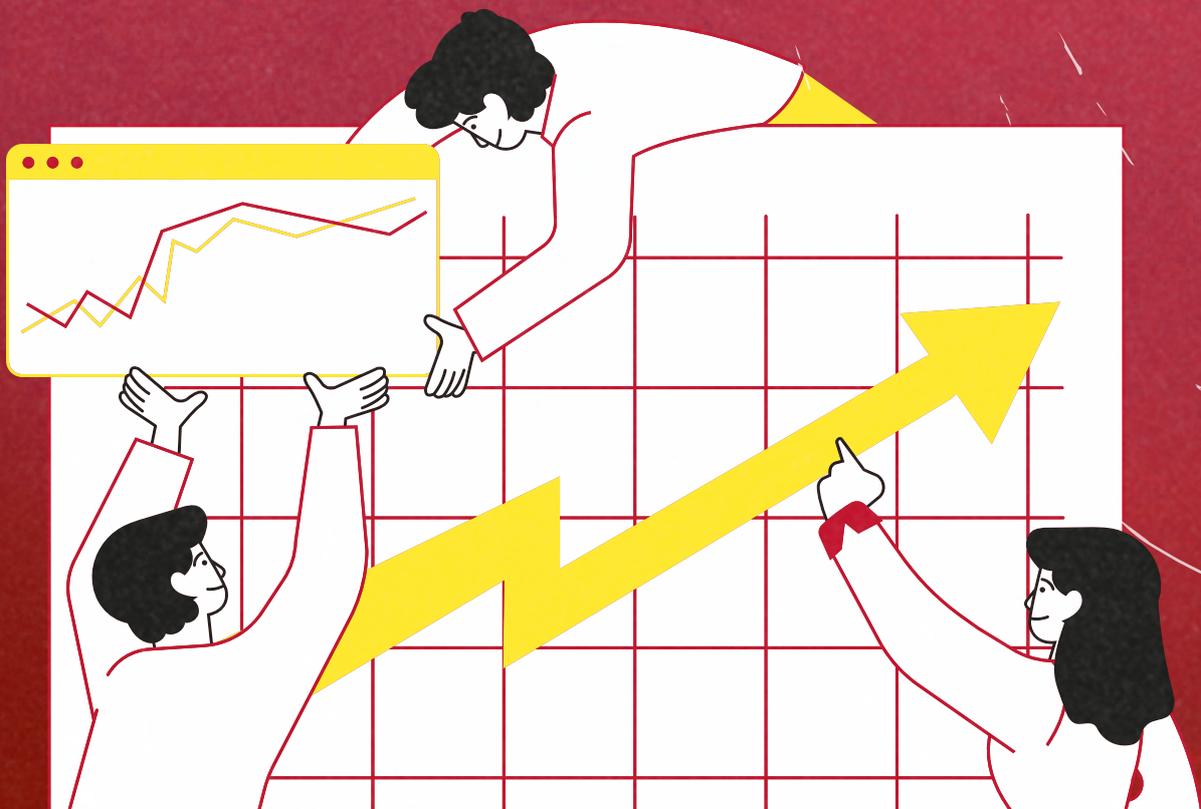
Introduction

The traditional logframe method ticks the boxes for planning and monitoring a project, but it falls short of capturing the nuance behind how change happens. The logframe simplifies the underlying complexities of how change occurs into numbers and neat checklists, omitting the voices, stories, and experiences of communities that lend richness to shaping a programme's impact. In today's fast-changing world, where issues are complex and interconnected and communities are dynamic and intersectional, we need to go beyond rigid frameworks and linear thinking.

That's why we're pushing for a powershifting approach in impact measurement, one that puts young people and communities in the driving seat, values lived experiences and uses participatory tools to capture the change that matters to the community, including both successes and lessons learned. Forget a one-size-fits-all approach: by making evaluations and impact measurement techniques flexible, inclusive, and driven by those most affected, we get a more honest and powerful picture of what's working and what needs to change. It's time to move from a tick-box approach to one that is inclusive, participatory, and reflective of the changes that a programme has had on young people and communities by centering them throughout the process of measuring impact.

Level Up Your Impact

Powershifting Strategies to Measure Change like a Pro!

We believe in a powershifting approach that can supplement the traditional logframe method with creative and innovative strategies to help capture the impact on young people and their communities, thereby strengthening the ways by which impact is measured. In today's complex and interrelated world, with inherent power imbalances, certain methods can be used to ensure that impact is captured in a holistic, inclusive and participatory manner.

One important alternative is the Theory of Change (ToC). It involves a collaborative process that outlines the steps needed to achieve desired long-term results. It also considers external factors and allows for adjustments as needed. This flexibility supports adaptive management, making it ideal for complex development projects where results may change over time. At Restless Development, this approach is rooted in youth leadership, making it inclusive and engaging, along with putting young people in the driver's seat.

The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique complements the Theory of Change (ToC) in capturing impact through stories from stakeholders. This method focuses on narratives to reveal significant, long-term, and sometimes unexpected and unintended changes that numbers can miss. MSC prioritises involving stakeholders, which helps everyone understand how change happens in complex social systems.

Outcome Harvesting is another valuable tool for identifying and analysing significant changes that occur as a result of an intervention, even if those changes don't align with the original goals. This method is beneficial in unpredictable or complex environments. It examines actual evidence of change and the role of the intervention, eliminating the need for a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Restless Development has established open communication channels with all stakeholders involved in our work, enabling them to provide feedback and input. This approach allows us to address the challenge of measuring long-term impacts and unexpected results that traditional logframes may overlook.

The Results–Based Management (RBM) approach further advances monitoring practices by emphasising results at all levels—outputs, outcomes, and impact—integrating continuous learning and adaptation (OECD, 2002). RBM promotes iterative planning, monitoring, and evaluation cycles, enabling projects to respond flexibly to unforeseen challenges and emerging opportunities. This approach counters the rigidity of static logframes, fostering a culture of ongoing reflection and adjustment. In practice, Restless Development prioritises dynamic accountability through listening exercises, which enable making informed decisions based on feedback provided by young people and communities.

Participatory evaluation methods, such as Appreciative Inquiry, Participatory Action Research, and Social Accountability Dialogues, that involve stakeholders at various stages of the evaluation process should be considered. These methods enhance relevance, foster ownership, and facilitate understanding of change from diverse perspectives. They are beneficial for capturing long–term impacts in complex social situations where top–down evaluations may be ineffective.

Using comparison groups is crucial in program evaluation to accurately assess an intervention's impact. By comparing outcomes between those who received the intervention and those who did not, evaluators can directly link differences to the program, thereby enhancing internal validity. Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) are the gold standard for minimizing selection bias, but when randomisation is not possible, matched comparison groups can be a viable alternative. It's important to consider ethical issues, such as withholding interventions from control groups, and to ensure consistent data collection to uphold the study's integrity.

Whatever be the method used, we believe incorporating the following can enhance the richness and relevance of our findings.

1. Using Mixed Methods

Combining quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive understanding of outcomes, capturing both measurable impacts and nuanced contextual details. The process should not be extractive; it should be engaging and simplified. The tools should use clear, concise language to avoid being perceived as extractive and burdensome to those collecting the information and those providing it.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Involving partners, local communities, and other relevant actors enhances the relevance and ownership of the findings. Involving those who are directly affected by the programme in data collection helps understand the real–world impact by allowing participants to identify what is important to them, making the experience more rewarding and less extractive.

3. Invest in Building Local MEL Capacities

Investing in the capacities of local actors in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) enhances data quality, sustainability, and the uptake of findings. Evaluating projects is crucial for assessing their effectiveness and impact, which helps identify strengths and weaknesses for informed future decisions. Communities should be empowered to lead in this process through deliberate investment in community–driven M&E, which should be a part of programme budgets.

4. Leveraging Technology

Digital tools, such as KoboCollect, can improve the timeliness, accuracy, and accessibility of information through real–time data collection, analysis, and visualisation. Shifting from MS Office tools reduces reporting fatigue and financial expenses, while promoting engagement.

5. Emphasising Learning and Adaptation

We need to assess and improve the way we work with communities continually. This involves gathering routine feedback from communities on what is working and should continue, what is not working and needs to change, and what should be stopped. This process not only provides valuable evidence of the changes being observed but also enables continuous refinement of the way we work with communities, ensuring that it remains responsive to their emerging needs. Integrating listening exercises and investing in developmental evaluation methods can be useful by allowing us to make real-time adjustments in complex situations.

In conclusion, these alternative frameworks collectively address the limitations of traditional logframes by emphasising flexibility, stakeholder involvement, contextual understanding, and long-term impact. Their combined use can provide a richer, more realistic assessment of development initiatives, particularly in complex and dynamic environments.

Why should you invest in community-led monitoring?

- It deliberately shifts power to the communities, ensuring sustainability. The community develops a sense of ownership and agency over the process.

- It promotes ownership and fosters greater engagement and accountability, as community members see their voices reflected in outcomes.

- It enhances accuracy and trust as community-led assessments tend to be more accurate because local stakeholders are familiar with subtle social dynamics, language nuances, and cultural sensitivities. Trust and familiarity reduce biases associated with outsider evaluations, leading to more honest and comprehensive data.

- It enhances inclusion as impact measurement that originates from within the community captures diverse viewpoints, including those of marginalised groups that are often overlooked by external assessments. This inclusivity ensures that the impact reflects the experiences of all community members, not just those with formal representation, power and access.

- It promotes community resilience by enabling continuous monitoring of progress and advocating for necessary changes that extend beyond the lifespan of specific projects.

- It prioritises community needs. Community-led metrics are more likely to focus on outcomes that matter most to the community, such as social cohesion, trust, or cultural preservation elements that external evaluators might not prioritise. This alignment fosters more meaningful evaluations and supports interventions to be genuinely responsive.

- It ensures sustainability. Solutions co-created with communities have a greater potential to be embraced, adapted, and championed by those directly affected, thus ensuring that they remain relevant and usable for the groups for which the interventions are designed.

RESTLESS
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Building Back Differently

Authored by Chintu Masanta & Designed by Abigail Amon

To survive and thrive amid shrinking aid, youth-led organisations must embrace alternatives that reflect their values and realities.

Introduction

Youth civil society is a vital driver of social transformation, gender justice, climate action, sexual and reproductive health, education, mental health, civic participation, and economic empowerment. Youth–led organisations play a crucial role in reaching underserved communities, including women and girls, rural populations, and young people themselves. Yet, a shrinking and increasingly politicised global aid landscape has pushed youth–led civil society to the margins.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) cuts from traditional donors like the UK, US, Germany, and the Netherlands have disproportionately affected youth–led organisations in the Majority World, particularly in sectors where they are most active. In the UK alone, funding for gender and adolescent programming was reduced by 33% far higher than the overall 21% aid budget cut (ODI Global, 2023), undermining sectors such as education, sexual and reproductive health, and humanitarian support where youth–led groups are most active. The Netherlands has agreed to structural development–aid cuts of €2.4 billion annually from 2027 while Germany's 2025 draft budget further reduces ODA–relevant envelopes, including a €941 million cut to BMZ (−8% vs 2024) and a €743 million cut to the Foreign Office (AA, −11%) (OECD, 2023; Devonald et al, 2023; Bundesregierung, 2024).

Traditional donor models, characterised by short–term, restricted, and top–down funding, often undermine local ownership. Meanwhile, youth movements have demonstrated extraordinary agility and impact, especially during COVID-19, often without institutional support. In Sierra Leone, youth leaders reached over 247,000 people through door-to-door COVID-19 awareness campaigns while in Tanzania, young volunteers pivoted to serve health needs in inventive ways such as establishment of small enterprises to manufacture and distribute face masks. In Zimbabwe, young people raised their hands through door-to-door campaigns, raising awareness about COVID-19 prevention and helping communities contain its spread (Restless Development, 2020).

Building back differently calls for a shift from compliance–driven funding to trust–based, decentralised, and sustainable resourcing models such as community philanthropy, mutual aid, participatory grantmaking, and social enterprise.

This chapter explores how youth civil society can be sustainably resourced not just to survive funding contractions but to thrive, centring equity, autonomy, and collective power.

The Human Cost: How Youth Civil Society Is Disproportionately Impacted by Aid Cuts

Youth-led organisations, especially those working in SRHR, civic engagement, gender justice, and climate action, often operate at the fringes of the formal funding ecosystem. They are agile, embedded in communities, and responsive to context. But their position as "non-traditional actors" renders them especially vulnerable to funding volatility.
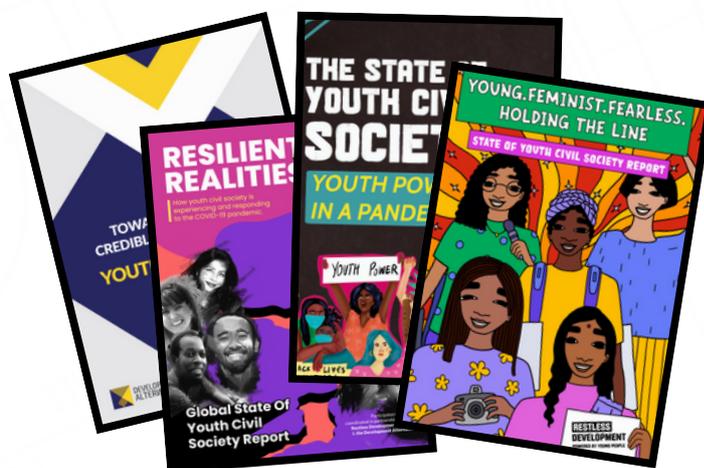
Restless Development's State of Youth Civil Society reports (2019–2024) document a stark pattern: short-term, project-based grants are the norm; compliance and auditing processes are excessively burdensome; and the expertise of youth leaders is routinely undervalued in policy circles (Restless Development, 2023). In a 2022 survey of youth–led groups in 27 countries, over 70% had annual budgets under $10,000 and cited funding insecurity as their top barrier to impact (Restless Development, 2023).

Cuts to ODA are not abstract – they ripple across the lives of young people in tangible ways. Reductions in youth-focused ODA have led to school closures, cuts to SRHR services, and reduced mental health support, especially for adolescent girls and LGBTQ+ youth (RC Publications Repository, 2024). In Zambia, these reductions have led to the closure of schools and the collapse of educational programs, depriving young people of their right to education. The United Nations reported that funding cuts forced schools in regions like Monze and Katete to close, leaving students without access to education and increasing the risk of early marriages and child labour (UN Zambia, 2025).

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services have also been severely impacted. The United States' withdrawal of funding for global health programs in early 2025 led to the suspension of family planning services, HIV prevention programs, and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Zambia (TIKO, 2025). These cuts have left young people without essential healthcare, putting them at risk of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

Mental health services, already scarce, have been further diminished due to ODA cuts. In Zambia, the reduction in funding led to the closure of counselling centres and the loss of trained mental health professionals, leaving young people without the support they need to cope with trauma and stress (Global Mental Health Action Network, 2025).

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, a leading youth-led organisation, is facing existential threats due to funding cuts. In 2024 and 2025, the world's largest ODA providers announced significant reductions in their aid budgets, severely impacting CHOICE's ability to operate. Without adequate funding, CHOICE is struggling to maintain its programs and advocacy efforts, jeopardising the future of youth-led movements globally (CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, 2025).

Youth without safety nets, especially those with disabilities, living in poverty, or in conflict-affected zones, are most at risk of violence, exploitation, and political radicalisation. In Zambia, the reduction in ODA led to the suspension of social protection programs and the withdrawal of humanitarian aid, leaving vulnerable youth without support and increasing their exposure to harm (SWP Berlin, 2025).

From Crisis to Opportunity: Reimagining the Funding Model

The contraction in aid can be viewed as a rupture but also a moment of reconstitution. It opens the door to fundamentally rethink the language, logic, and practice of funding youth civil society. Youth-led organisations interviewed expressed that traditional aid models are often very rigid and have requirements that grassroots organisations frequently struggle to meet, which puts youth-led organisations at a disadvantage. A representative from Dzuka Cholinga, a youth-led organisation in Lusaka, expressed:

"Traditional donor funding is very restrictive, and often we struggle to comply with the requirements, issues of previous audits by big, expensive firms that we cannot afford as well as restrictions on how funding should be spent with no flexibility make it difficult sometimes to conduct our community work effectively, it is difficult to adapt the funding to community needs."

Restless Development's #FundYouthPower initiative argues that the aid system must be recast on four pillars: flexible funding, trust-based partnerships, intersectional inclusion, and youth-defined impact (Restless Development, 2024). These principles respond directly to the structural critiques raised by youth actors themselves and are grounded in practical, field-tested alternatives.

"The traditional aid system makes no room for trust. It often feels more like a performance than a partnership. With the collapse of ODA and how deeply it's affected us, we urgently need a new way to fund and sustain the change we want to see in our communities."

Open Net 4 All Zambia, Choma (2025)

With the growing momentum for aid localisation, calls to decolonise development, and the reality of a shrinking ODA landscape, youth-led organisations must rethink how they resource their work. The moment demands a bold shift away from dependency on traditional donor-driven models, and toward funding approaches that are sustainable, community-rooted, and driven by lived experience. Here's how youth-led organisations can begin to build back differently:

1. Community Philanthropy

What it is:
Community philanthropy empowers local people to lead in solving local challenges by pooling their resources, time, knowledge, and social capital. It focuses on relationships, trust, and community-defined priorities rather than donor-led agendas.

Where it has worked:
The Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF) has provided unrestricted grants to grassroots organisations while embedding learning and mutual accountability. Their approach prioritises long-term partnership and capacity strengthening (ZGF, 2022). In Zambia's Nyankanga community, ZGF partnered with Plan International Zambia to pilot a powerful shift in power: the reverse proposal model.

Rather than asking local organisations to respond to predefined calls for proposals, Plan and ZGF flipped the script, inviting communities to set the agenda and lead on project design. The Nyankanga-based CBO proposed a community-led solution to address early marriage and school dropout among adolescent girls. Plan

International responded to this "reverse call," underwent community-led due diligence, and co-created the intervention with local actors.

Why it matters:
Reverse proposals challenge traditional donor power dynamics by putting communities in the driver's seat. This model encourages local ownership, supports asset-based community development, and ensures that projects are not only relevant but sustainable. It builds a foundation of mutual trust and respect, where INGOs are accountable to communities, not just the other way around.

"Reverse proposals helped us stop chasing funding that didn't fit. Now, we define what matters, and donors come alongside us."

Nyankanga CBO Youth Leader

2. Mutual Aid

What it is:
Mutual aid is a practice where communities self-organise to meet their own needs through reciprocity and solidarity. Unlike charity, it is based on shared responsibility, care, and collective survival.

Where it has worked:
During the COVID-19 pandemic, youth in East Jerusalem formed emergency committees that distributed food, delivered medical supplies, and provided accurate information—all without external funding (Al-Monitor, 2021).

Why it matters:
Mutual aid promotes community care, reduces dependence on external donors, and challenges top-down models. It is agile and adaptable in crisis contexts.

3. Social Enterprise

What it is:
Social enterprises are mission-driven ventures that generate revenue while advancing a social or environmental cause. They combine entrepreneurial strategies with social impact goals.

Where it has worked:
BongoHive Zambia supports youth entrepreneurs to build tech-based solutions to local challenges. They offer business incubation, mentorship, and access to funding to youth-led startups (UNDP, 2023).

Why it matters:
Social enterprise offers a path to financial independence and helps youth organisations become less reliant on donor cycles. It also creates employment and drives innovation.

4. Participatory Grantmaking (PGM)

What it is:
PGM is a funding model where the people most affected by issues actively participate in decisions about where and how resources are allocated.

Where it has worked:
Restless Development is putting this model into practice in several initiatives, among them is the Young Gamechangers Fund in the UK, a £4.5 million initiative co-created with a youth steering group that gives young people aged 10–25 real decision-making power over branding, strategy, and grant distribution (Co-op Foundation & Restless Development, 2023–2025).

In Zambia, participatory principles have been embedded in the Localised Strategy 2022–2030, which strengthens youth leadership and community accountability through the "Youth Collective." This ensures that young Zambians are not just consulted but actively shape priorities, funding decisions, and the implementation of development solutions in their own communities (Restless Development Zambia, 2023).

Why it matters:
PGM fosters trust, relevance, and community ownership. It addresses power imbalances in philanthropy and makes youth more than just beneficiaries.

A compelling example is the participatory grantmaking model tested by Plan International in 2022. Young activists across 11 countries, including Kenya and Colombia, were given decision-making power to allocate funds towards their community-led priorities. Youth-led groups reported feeling more trusted and said the process strengthened their leadership and sustainability (Plan International, 2023).

Redefining Accountability and Impact

Traditional metrics like KPIs and logframes often fail to capture the depth of youth-led work. In contrast, youth-led accountability emphasises storytelling, relational metrics, and learning. In Tanzania, young feminists created participatory scorecards to track SRHR service delivery and hold officials accountable for tools that were both evaluative and transformative (Restless Development, 2023).

What Young People Need to Know...

1. Why Build Back Differently?

To survive and thrive amid shrinking aid, youth-led organisations must embrace alternatives that reflect their values and realities. Asking difficult questions, such as Why do we need to build back differently? Who are we building for? And what exactly are we building? Change starts with understanding what hasn't worked and envisioning new pathways.

2. What Works for You?

There is no universal solution. Organisations should evaluate what aligns with their mission, context, and community's strengths. For some, a single model might work, but others may require a hybrid of multiple models that may offer the best fit.

3. What Are the Legal Implications?

Understanding national laws around compliance, registration, and taxation is crucial. This ensures resilience and legality, especially when implementing hybrid models that include social enterprises. It also provides a unique opportunity for advocacy towards reform of national laws around compliance.

Conclusion: Building Our Own Tables

We are no longer asking for inclusion in systems that exclude us. Youth civil society is already building new tables rooted in equity, care, and community power.

Building back differently means:
1. Centring trust and relationships over reports
2. Embracing sustainability over survival
3. Choosing community-defined impact over donor-defined metrics

This is our opportunity to reimagine what funding justice looks like from the ground up.