

# SHIFTING THE FIELD

Philanthropy's role in strengthening  
child- and youth-led community  
rooted groups



# Shifting the Field: Philanthropy's role in strengthening child- and youth-led community rooted groups

An exploratory research

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Prepared by



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## About Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG)

Elevate Children Funders Group is the leading global network of funders focused exclusively on the well-being and rights of children and youth. We focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

We support children and youth by building a community of funders and creating spaces for:

- Greater learning and effectiveness in how we use our individual resources.
- More collaboration and alignment across our philanthropic strategies.
- Collective action for more and better funding, and support for our wider field.

## About the researchers: IWORDS Global

IWORDS Global is a social entrepreneurship with years of experience in human rights, development, and relief. The organization seeks to strengthen civil society organizations, multilateral agencies, movements, networks, and social responsibility efforts, and support them in their work in reaching the most vulnerable populations. Our services include project and programme design, monitoring, evaluation and learning tools, generation of evidence, resource mobilization, and institutional strengthening. Through its IWORDS Consulting Unit, IWORDS Global has collaborated with many international, regional, and local organizations in over 120 countries across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East.

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## Executive Summary

In 2019, Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG) commissioned the exploratory study 'Philanthropy's role in strengthening child- and youth-led community rooted groups.' The objective of this study was to **map current practices in philanthropic support for child- and youth-led work at the community level and provide strategic advice to donors on how to strengthen their funding modalities through participatory approaches to achieve greater and more effective impact.** ECFG expects to use findings and recommendations from this process—conducted through literature review, key informant interviews, focus groups, and online surveys with funders, child- and youth-led community rooted groups, and non-funders—to pave the road for members of ECFG to challenge their own practices; build on the broader philanthropic momentum to shift money down to the grassroots level; explore ways to influence the broader philanthropic sector; and influence and shift the wider donor community thinking and approaches.

*Child- and youth-led community rooted groups include groups and organizations that are driven and informed by children and young people and their ecosystems (parents, families, caretakers, and teachers) and that are rooted in the community.*

*Working definition agreed by ECFG and IWORDS Global for the implementation of this study.*

## Key findings

Findings gathered through this study have been grouped in two areas: A. detrimental and unproductive field practices in philanthropic support to child- and youth-led community rooted groups; and B. participatory philanthropy in the field of children and youth rights.

### Detrimental and/or unproductive field practices

There is a persisting concern among study informants that funding aimed at addressing the needs of children and youth in adversity reaches mainly international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and focuses primarily on health and nutrition initiatives. Community-led work, particularly efforts led by children and youth, is underfunded. The reasons behind this are complex but are often related to difficulties in putting children and youth in the centre of decision-making and in shifting power from funders to communities. Although practices are not uniform across the philanthropic sector—a growing number of funders are in a constant journey of self-reflection and transformation<sup>1</sup>, others still follow a tokenistic and/or hierarchical and top-down approach when it comes to supporting locally-led work—qualitative data gathered through this study helps to confirm where the critical challenges remain:

**Securing the funding:** child- and youth-led community rooted groups are **mostly self-funded and reliant on volunteerism.** Accessing resources (both financial and technical support) is not an easy task; the process often involves liaising with other adult-led organizations operating in the context, as these actors have the conditions to meet eligibility requirements related to registration, financial processes, etc. **The experience of accessing resources is described as one where child- and youth-led community rooted groups are left feeling invisible and overwhelmed.** Many found the process highly competitive, costly, and inaccessible in terms of language. When funding finally does reach community organizations, these resources are often restricted to specific projects. **Grants are small, short-term, and unpredictable.** Also, funders often promote the idea of resilient communities, yet project adaptations are questioned and the processes to request changes lack flexibility.

**Using the funds:** the relationship between child- and youth-led community rooted groups and funders evidently continues beyond the allocation of funds. Through the process of using the funds, other detrimental and/or unproductive practices appear. For instance, **when funders open the door to provide technical support to their grantees, the process is often not guided by the self-identified needs and requests of children and young people.** In some cases, the technical support offered responds to a genuine interest in supporting capacity building for these groups. However, in other cases, it stems more from patronizing concerns about how the cost effectiveness and evidence-based nature of the work led by these populations or from more top-down approaches that try to standardize or align the work of grantees with what technical experts, funders' boards of directors, and other stakeholders see as 'ideal organizing'. Similarly, when measuring success and impact of their interventions, children and youth are constrained by rigid definitions of efficiency, effectiveness, and impact that do not necessarily fit with their understanding of how change happens in their communities and lives.

A bigger challenge appears when these groups want to showcase their work and share their learnings with funders: reporting requirements are burdensome and lack flexibility. **Also, funders do not necessarily encourage sharing instances of 'failure'** (as measured by quantitative measures), which serve as opportunities for reflection and development of new potential solutions. Finally, the frustration grows as **funders often ask for accountability from their grantees, while some of them seldom report back to organizations about their work, their processes, their selection criteria, and their finances.**

**Decision-making:** the most damaging factor that this study uncovered—according to informants and the literature review—is the existence of power imbalances. Although power dynamics are expected in a relationship mediated by money, failure to recognize the agency and power of children and youth in generating a lasting change in their communities undermines the work of locally-led groups. The intersecting factor of adultism, which permeates our society, enhances power balances in the children's rights field. Children and young people only have limited space in decision-making spaces, and even when they join these spaces, other stakeholders do not always recognize them as equal. There is also additional mistrust of children and youth in the Global South, or from marginalized or underprivileged communities in the Global North.

Power imbalances manifest in four key behaviours evident in funders:

- Having a 'knowing all attitude' about the priorities and needs of children and youth.
- Promoting blanket solutions to address complex issues at the community level.
- Controlling many aspects of funding implementation to mitigate risks/ensure value for money of their interventions.
- Imposing abusive requirements—unrealistic, excessive, and intrusive demands—as conditions to provide the grant.

One of the dire consequences of power imbalances in the funder-grantee relationship includes, among other things, reinforcing the structural inequalities that created the conditions that threaten the safety of children and young people.

## Constructive and participatory practices in philanthropy

Based on the study findings, strategies to address potentially detrimental and unproductive field practices can be grouped into six categories. The common denominator in all of these recommended practices is that they focus on putting child- and youth-led community rooted groups at the centre of decision-making.

- **Acknowledging and rebalancing power:** this includes being aware of other systems of oppression present in the funder-grantee relationship, strengthening intergenerational collaboration, ensuring that children and youth's perspectives inform all phases of programming—from strategy development to the evaluation of initiatives—and shifting decision-making to children and youth.
- **Bearing the 'burden':** funders are encouraged to take responsibility for the time, resources, and adaptations required to immerse in a process of transforming the funder-grantee relationship.
- **Amplifying the voices of children and young people:** these practices focus on efforts to support movement building, to ensure the voices of children and young people are taken seriously.
- **Offering flexible funding:** using this funding modality—where funds are not attached to restricted projects—demonstrates that children and youth are trusted and believed in and that the changing nature of their environments is acknowledged.
- **Implementing participatory grantmaking:** this practice involves shifting power in grantmaking decisions from foundations to the people most affected and who have first-hand knowledge and experience on the issues being sought to address. While not all study informants are familiar with the practice, this modality is already seen by funders and other studies and evaluations as a good practice, with the potential to disrupt and democratize philanthropy.
- **Engaging children and youth beyond the grantmaking cycle:** children and youth who participated in the study greatly valued when relationships with funders go beyond the transactional aspect of their relationship. This involves, among other things, offering other opportunities to advance their work, such as networking.

This study concludes that **while the work of supporting child- and youth-led community rooted groups has advanced significantly in recent years, there is still much work to be done at different levels:** a real participatory philanthropy will engage grantees and communities at all levels, in the board of directors, as part of the staff, in strategic planning including agenda setting, in designing grantmaking and evaluation processes, and resource mobilization, etc. The task is not easy and requires, among other things, conducting a thorough process of self-assessment and humbleness on the side of each funder, and bringing on board other stakeholders in the development and humanitarian sectors.



# 1. Introduction

## Background

While the world has made progress in the realization of a range of children's rights since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted, there are concerns that some of the gains for children achieved are at risk of stagnation—and even reversal in a few cases. Poverty, malnutrition, poor access to health, child and forced marriage, early pregnancy, and violence are among the many challenges children and young people face, especially the most vulnerable, across the world.<sup>2</sup> Achieving impact in transforming the needs of children and youth facing adversity requires multisectoral efforts—including by the philanthropic community. It also requires child and youth engagement in all processes of decision-making.

Child and youth participation is not only the right thing to do, but an effective strategy to maximize impact. 'Evidence indicates that successful adolescent and youth engagement programmes can help to develop self-confidence, influence decisions at local and national levels, and contribute to addressing socio-economic challenges in their communities.'<sup>3</sup> It also indicates that 'participation of young people in programmes and policies that affect them will improve the quality, responsiveness, impact and viability of programmes, and will prepare young people for more active and fruitful citizenship.'<sup>4</sup>

For philanthropists, committing to improved child and youth engagement requires, among other things:

- Looking into existing power dynamics in the relationship between funders and child- and youth-led community rooted groups working on children's and youth rights and well-being.
- Exposing the existing possibly detrimental practices of funding and programming.
- Identifying alternative mechanisms and strategies that promote participation throughout the philanthropic cycle, from strategy development, to programme design, to grant allocation, to monitoring and evaluation.

The availability of this information can pave the road for philanthropists to:

- Challenge their own practices.
- Build on the broader philanthropic momentum to shift money down to the grassroots level.
- Explore ways to influence the broader philanthropic sector.
- Influence and shift the wider donor community thinking and approaches.

With this in mind, in the last quarter of 2019, ECFG commissioned the design and implementation of an exploratory study to **map current practices in philanthropic support for child- and youth-led work at the community level and provide strategic advice to donors on how to strengthen their funding modalities through participatory approaches to achieve greater and more effective impact.** IWORDS Global, a social enterprise focused on the delivery of innovative and comprehensive solutions for social mission-driven organizations, networks, and collectives, and with long-term experience implementing participatory research and evaluation, was commissioned to carry out this desk-based study.

This publication provides an account of findings and recommendations gathered through desk review and participatory data collection methods, such as virtual focus groups, key informant interviews, and online surveys. The study brings together the voices of funders, representatives from child- and youth-led community rooted groups, and non-funders.

## Report structure

- **Study scope and methodology** offers a summary of the main methodological considerations, data collection tools, sources of information, and limitations to the desk-based research.
- **Section A** provides an analysis of some of the detrimental and/or unproductive field practices that child- and youth-led community rooted groups face in their relationship with funders, from the perspective of the study informants and the literature review. Findings are grouped around challenges when securing and implementing resources and practices around decision-making/power.



- **Section B** provides an overview of constructive and participatory practices aimed to challenge detrimental and unproductive practices—including positive examples found in the philanthropic sector—as identified by the study informants and the literature review.
- **Conclusions** offers a brief overview of potential challenges and dilemmas for funders, as they embark on a journey of transformation, from the perspective of the study team. In addition, it provides additional recommendations to promote transformation within philanthropy and finding support to address unproductive field dynamics and power imbalances across the philanthropic sector.
- **Annexes** (non-published) includes a detailed list of the bibliography consulted by the study team, a brief document flagging areas that may require further research, and data collection tools.

It is important to highlight that the decision of the study team to focus first on detrimental and unproductive field practices (Section A.) and then on positive responses (Section B.) does not intend to paint a gloomy picture of philanthropy. Many of the good practices currently in use in the sector are precisely a response from funders who have already gone through a self-assessment/questioning process about their relationship with locally-led groups and children and youth in particular. Therefore, it seems more logical for the reader to get a detailed understanding of where the challenges are, before sharing some of the positive trends.

## Audience

The findings and recommendations of this study primarily aim to inform the work of ECFG members and other non-member funders, and to provide a resource enabling them to work together to influence power holders to contribute to shifting the field's practices. However, diverse audiences can also benefit from its content, in particular, children, youth, and other community stakeholders leading efforts to transform power imbalances and unproductive field dynamics in the funder-grantee relationship.

## 2. Study scope and methodology

In order to map current practices in philanthropic support for child- and youth-led work at the community level and provide strategic advice to donors on how to strengthen their funding modalities through participatory approaches to achieve greater and more effective impact, the study team focused on uncovering information for the following areas of analysis:<sup>ii</sup>

### Current practices in philanthropic support

- The funding process: i.e. Who gets funding and why? How does funding for youth-led and community-led work privilege (or not) dominant race, gender, ethnic, and class groups in communities? What are the key mechanisms to provide support (financial and technical support) to locally-led work? Who measures success and based on what? How are these practices perceived by grantees? How are funders accountable to their grantees?
- Decision-making through the philanthropic cycle: i.e. Who makes decisions at each critical stage? What are the key barriers to participate in decision-making processes for different actors? Who has a voice in existing participatory mechanisms set up by funders?

### Alternatives for improved participatory approaches

- Participatory grantmaking: i.e. How does it work? Does it work? Is it enough?
- Other potential good practices to address power imbalances and unproductive field dynamics.

### Future action

- Finding support to address unproductive field dynamics and power imbalances: i.e. How can philanthropists bring other donors on board (engage, educate, collaborate with) to improve current practices?

### 2.1. Methods and process

**The study methodology prioritized participatory methods** contextualized to factors such as research questions/areas of analysis; time limitations; confidentiality/safety considerations of informants; age, sex/gender, and literacy level of informants; availability/interest of informants in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; and to the fact that the whole process was meant to be conducted through remote mechanisms. For the desk review, the study team focused on published and grey literature and research, organizational reports, evaluations, all available information, and analysing the context, key players, emerging trends, and gaps. Researchers used relevant national and international journal articles and websites of key organizations, online newsletters and blogs devoted to philanthropic indices, tools, and databases as well as online conference videos and other digital resources. Publications older than 10 years were discarded to ensure that the report responds to the most current trends and practices.

**The study was implemented in collaboration with co-researchers from three different regions; they were selected through an open call process disseminated by IWORDS and partner organizations.** Candidates were selected by IWORDS Global ensuring diversity (to the extent possible, acknowledging that there were only three positions available). The three youth co-researchers were Shazmeen Nisha from Fiji, Warda Batool from Pakistan, and Muhubo Hussain from Kenya and their contributions were invaluable to this process. To decrease the barriers of participation for co-researchers from different backgrounds and profiles, no particular research experience was required. Consequently, they were trained in conceptual frameworks around grantmaking, as well as the data collection tools. After the training, the co-researchers reviewed and contributed to the mapping exercise, provided feedback on data collection tools, and conducted interviews and focus group discussions. They also provided valuable feedback on the zero version of the draft report.

<sup>ii</sup> The inception report for this study considered additional research questions/areas of analysis. However, during the data collection and data analysis process and during the process of producing the first draft of this publication, the study team and ECFG decided to focus on a selection of topics. The decision considered the quality and rigor of the information available, as well as current areas of priority for ECFG. Taking this into account, a document flagging pending issues to be addressed (parking lot) has been developed parallel to this report to be shared with ECFG and the Advisory Group.

## 2.2. Sources

Informants for the agreed data collection methods were identified through a mapping exercise conducted in close coordination with ECFG—co-consultants Kate Matheson and Chelsea Ricker—and the research advisory group. Through this exercise, the study team identified funders working at different levels (national, regional, and global) as potential informants and youth- and child-led community rooted groups operating across different countries.<sup>iii</sup>

<b>Focus groups</b>	3 focus groups involving young people: Bangladesh, Brazil, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Pakistan, and Tanzania.
<b>Key informant interviews</b>	<p><b>50 involving:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child- and youth-led community rooted groups: Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Malawi, Nepal, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>iv</sup></li> <li>Funders: Colombia, Germany, India, Nigeria, Panama, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sweden, Uganda, United Kingdom, and United States.</li> </ul>
<b>Surveys</b>	<p>21 respondents, involving funders from: Canada (1), Kenya (1), Lebanon (1), Mexico (1), Nepal (1), Senegal (1), South Africa (1), Sweden (1), Switzerland (1), United Kingdom (2), United States (6), Zimbabwe (1), and non-identified (3).</p> <p>67 respondents, involving individuals from self-identified child- and youth-led community rooted groups: Bangladesh (2), Bulgaria (1), Cameroon (1), Canada (2), Colombia (3), El Salvador (1), Fiji (5), Georgia (1), Guatemala (1), India (3), Kenya (15), Kyrgyzstan (1), Mali (1), Mexico (2), Morocco (1), Myanmar (1), Nepal (1), Nicaragua (2), Nigeria (2), Pakistan (9), Philippines (1), Rwanda (1), Samoa (1), South Africa (2), South Sudan (1), United Kingdom (3), United States (1), and Zambia (2).</p>

Information gathered from different sources was triangulated during the data analysis process, confirming consistency of the data generated by different data collection methods. When data was not consistent, or there was contradictory information, the team revisited the data to clarify and validate any points of convergence or divergence.

## 2.3. Limitations and challenges

### Virtual data collection

Since the study was implemented entirely online, organizations that do not have a digital presence may have been excluded from the process. To address this limitation, the research team ensured that the desk review captured a diversity of regions, languages, and thematic areas, and made the questionnaire available via email. The data collection tools were also administered in French and Spanish and interviews in Nepali and Swahili were also conducted to ensure a broader range of participation from interested informants.

### Implementation dates

The months of November–December 2019, when the core of the original data collection took place, are particularly busy for donors as well as youth/community-based organizations, which resulted in the unavailability of some key informants. A second round of data collection took place as the COVID-19 pandemic hit unexpectedly around the globe, which presented additional challenges in keeping the availability of informants.

### Availability of documentation

The study team reviewed both published and grey literature available on the different areas covered in this research from the last 10 years. However, gaining access to internal documentation from specific donors—such as their grantmaking strategies and decision-making process—was not always possible as they are not readily available and are not always shared externally.

<sup>iii</sup> See clarification on definitions below.

<sup>iv</sup> Respondents were asked to provide their country (however, the question did not clarify 'country of origin' or 'country where you are based').

## The challenge of terminology/labels

As mentioned above, the study brings together the voices of funders, non-funders, and representatives from child- and youth-led community rooted groups. The latter includes groups and organizations that are driven and informed by children and young people and their ecosystems (parents, families, caretakers, and teachers) and that are rooted in the community. However, the level of involvement or participation of children and young people may vary depending on their age, capacities, context, and profile of the organizations. For the purposes of this research, the study team only considered groups and organizations that self-identify with this working definition as sources of information. It is important to clarify that the study team does not have the capacity to question (and should not, in any case, as that would be perceived as an exercise of power) if an organization or group really meets the above definition, before accepting them as a source. When inviting sources for primary data collection, organizations and groups had the right to determine themselves whether they fall under the above definition or even feel comfortable with it.

We are mindful that the above definition of child- and youth-led community rooted groups is imperfect and does not necessarily capture the diversity of organizations or groups that may be working with children and young people and their supporting systems in the communities. We are also aware that terms and concepts such as child-led, child-centred, youth-led, youth-centred, or youth-focused are regularly used, at times interchangeably. However, we also understand the high complexity associated with each and every one of these terms (reflective of the complexity of the sector and ecosystem) and the lack of consensus around them. **We encourage further discussion to debate and gain consensus around the above terms and ideas through participatory processes that involve children and young people as well as the communities that support them.**

## Section A. Detrimental and unproductive field practices in philanthropic support to child- and youth-led community rooted groups

There is a persisting concern that funding aimed at addressing the needs of children and youth in adversity reaches mainly INGOs and that it is imbalanced and short-sighted, as it focuses primarily in health and nutrition initiatives. Community-led work on human rights, particularly efforts led by children and youth, are underfunded.<sup>5</sup>

**The concern for community, children, and youth participation<sup>6</sup> in self-defining their challenges and leading solutions is not new among rights, development, and humanitarian stakeholders. While it is an unfinished agenda that at times leans towards tokenism more than true participation, significant progress has been made over the past few decades across the board.** Not only is children's and youth participation recognized as a right in multiple global frameworks—i.e. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>V</sup>—but there are positive examples at the global level, such as an existing constituency—the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY)—mandated to

facilitate the voice of children and young people, for all processes convened at the UN on development issues.<sup>7</sup> There is also a formal recognition in the Sustainable Development Agenda that 'real solutions to the economic and social challenges facing youth will begin and end at home...therefore governments should support those youth initiatives and activities at the grassroots and national levels.'<sup>8</sup> In addition, nowadays it is not uncommon to find global, regional, and national level decision-making platforms (e.g. multilateral agencies) involving children and young people in some way or another, and to find that international/regional/national level non-governmental organizations have formalized mechanisms to engage children and young people in decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

**Positive examples of participatory practices and of support to child- and youth-led community rooted groups are also found in the philanthropic sector.** These range from inviting groups to help set priorities and develop strategies, sit on foundation boards or advisory committees, earmark funding for groups that are led by children and youth, channel funding to these groups through fiscal sponsors/umbrella organizations, and engage in participatory grantmaking.<sup>10 11</sup>

**Practices are not uniform across the philanthropic sector, with 'individual organizations and institutions embracing and testing new practices on their own'.<sup>12</sup>** While a growing number of funders are in a constant journey of self-reflection and transformation,<sup>13</sup> others still follow a tokenistic and/or hierarchical and top-down approach when it comes to supporting locally-led work. Intentionally or unintentionally, a number of funders often neglect and sometimes reinforce the structural inequalities and power imbalances that created the conditions that threaten the safety of children and young people.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of children's capacities and perspectives and of local notions of harm and damage, some philanthropists are also investing in child protection programming that imposes barriers to participation and agency.<sup>15 16</sup>

Qualitative data gathered for this study offers a picture of some of the detrimental and/or unproductive field practices in current use. These practices can be grouped in two umbrella areas: **1.** Funding modalities and funding flows; and **2.** Decision-making/power. Positive and emerging practices are documented in Section B. of this report.

### A.1. Funding modalities and funding flows

#### A.1.1 Securing resources

Before discussing the experiences around securing funding through philanthropic grantmaking for child- and youth-led community rooted groups, it is crucial to acknowledge a few aspects connected to how these groups access resources:

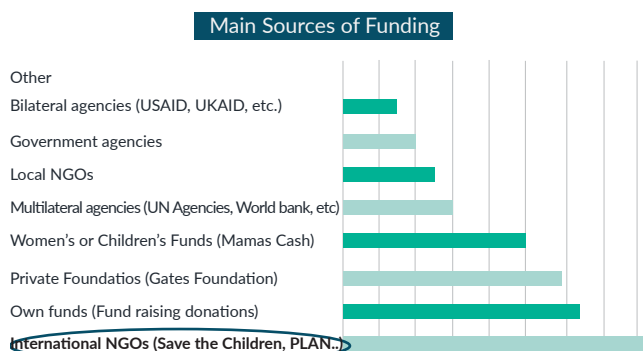
'Tokenistic leadership can refer to several situations. It is the idea that one eloquent youth leader makes a movement. It can mean putting people in leadership roles without giving them the support they need to fulfil those roles. It can also involve putting young people in leadership roles and then limiting the scope of the role to the extent that that young people do not have any real, actionable power.'\*

\* Johnson, V., Lewin, T., & Cannon, M. (2020). *Learning from a Living Archive: Rejuvenating Child and Youth Rights and Participation*

<sup>V</sup> The participation component is articulated in Article 12 of the UNCRC, which expresses 'the Right to be Heard'. That right includes raising children's voices and the responsibility of duty bearers (including parents and states) to listen to them and act on their perspectives (Lansdown pers. comm. 2019).

- **Most community groups and organizations, especially smaller ones led by children or youth, are primarily self-funded**, as confirmed by study informants. Not only do they often volunteer their time to implement efforts, but they also gather funds through ‘traditional’ practices such as raffles, offline crowdfunding, selling products/ food developed by group members, or fundraising to obtain donations of goods. Some groups are currently learning to navigate the world of online crowdfunding. These funds, of course, are very limited and seldom allow groups or organizations to become more established (if that is what they are looking for), hire staff, rent office space, register, or expand their activities and programming.
- It is also important to highlight that **child- and youth-led community rooted groups do not always access funding through a direct relationship with grantmaking foundations**. Through the study survey, the representatives from these groups (see Diagram 2.) confirmed that international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) represent one of their main sources of funding. In the majority of cases, the funding offered by INGOs comes from an ‘actual donor or funder’ (i.e., governments, private foundations, other).<sup>VI</sup> Yet, the groups identify the INGO as their donor, considering they are the ones launching the funding opportunity at the local level and disbursing and monitoring the use of the resources.

**Diagram 2.** Study survey respondents identified INGOs as the largest source of funding



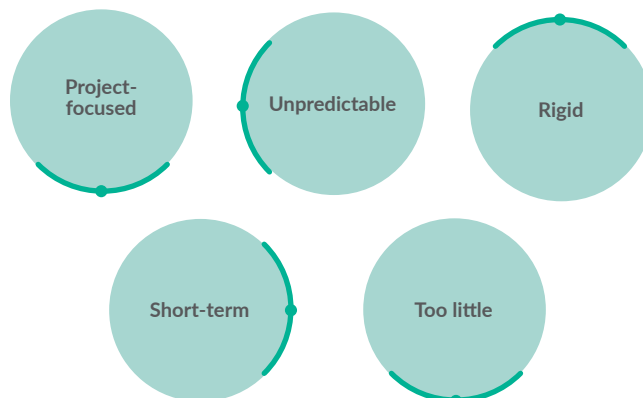
- Finally, **funders often ask community groups and organizations, especially smaller ones led by children or youth, to provide a fiscal sponsor or umbrella organization that is willing to manage the financial aspects of the grant** (due to lack of registration, among other factors, that will be discussed later in this report). This practice has been a step forward in enabling small or new groups and collectives to access funding. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the use of this mechanism is not always acknowledged in regulatory frameworks of all countries; therefore, many groups cannot benefit from it.<sup>VII</sup> In addition, as demonstrated by other studies, groups feel that they lose some level of independence, as the fiscal sponsor retains control and discretion over the funds and asks for records and reports to fulfil its oversight responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> The ‘pros and cons’ of the relationship between the group and the fiscal sponsor affect whether the funder is seen as participatory and able to connect to the local realities.

Securing resources is not an easy task for child- and youth-led community rooted groups, especially in a world of limited resources, as acknowledged by study informants and confirmed by the literature review. Diagram 3. shows the most common words used by relevant informants to describe the experience of accessing resources, both financial and in the form of technical support. Diagram 4. offers five keywords that illustrate how groups characterize the funding available to them.

**Diagram 3.** Characteristics of funding available to child- and youth- led community rooted groups



**Diagram 4.** The experience of accessing resources according to study informants



<sup>VI</sup> The study team acknowledges that some INGOs have their own social enterprises or models to generate income. This means that, in some cases, the funding channelled to child- and youth-led community rooted groups is part of their self-generated income. In those cases INGOs may be fulfilling a donor role.

<sup>VII</sup> For instance, a survey respondent from India indicated that fiscal sponsorships is not allowed under the foreign grant regulation laws and systems in the country. Given language, time, and Study scope constraints, it has not been possible for the Study team to research on how widespread is this problem across the world.

## The experience of accessing resources according to study informants

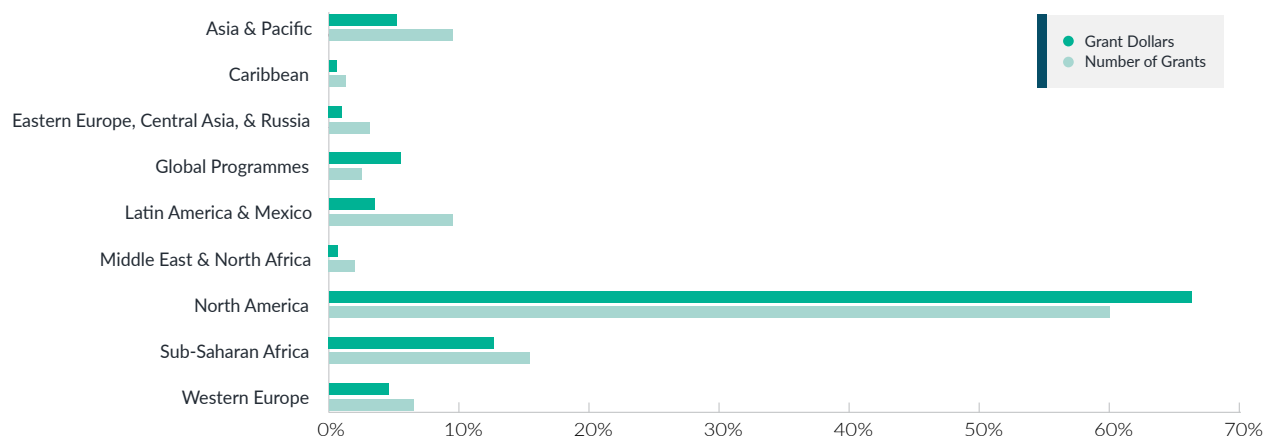
### Study informants report feelings of invisibility

For child- and youth-led community rooted groups, the feeling of invisibility can be associated to multiple factors:

**a. The characteristics of the organization**, i.e., it works on a topic that is not prioritized by funders or its work is not considered unique compared to other similar groups. For instance, research from the project Advancing Human Rights: The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking<sup>VIII</sup> indicates that for 2017, the three top issues supported by foundations in connection to children's rights, were: education/religion/culture, freedom of violence, and equality rights, and freedom from discrimination. These had a combined budget of over US\$322 million and a total of 2,060 grants. Topics such as expression and information rights, transitional justice, and peacebuilding, and economic and labour rights are on the bottom of the agenda, with a combined allocation of over US\$19 million and only 221 grants.

**b. The geographical areas where a group operates.** As evident in Diagram 5., most of the human rights foundation funding and grants stay in North America and, to some extent, in Sub-Saharan Africa. While part of the explanation for this is that many of the foundations used in the cited analysis have their base in the Global North, the reality is that many regions have fallen from the scope of action of philanthropists and other donors, which generates 'imbalances that can impair the effectiveness of aid through aid fragmentation as well as accumulation of providers in some countries—so called “darlings”—and gaps in aid provision in others.’<sup>18</sup>

**Diagram 5.** North America receives the highest number of grants and funding from foundations, for human rights work



Source: The State of Global Foundation Grantmaking, online source

### c. Feelings of invisibility can also be the result of a lack of networks/connections that facilitate access to funding.

Funders consulted for this study acknowledged that reaching child- and youth-led groups that are rooted in the community is not always an easy task, especially when some funders do not have a presence in the community or even in the country or region. Oftentimes, these groups are not registered, do not have a physical space, and may not even have any form of online presence. Therefore, identifying them, reaching them, and supporting them requires a conscious effort. Mechanisms—such as visits to local communities and using information from other organizations or funders—to identify community rooted groups are alternatives to formal calls for proposals; these seem to be working for some informants, although they have their limitations with regards to ‘uncovering’ innovative and unique work at the community level.

“ ‘I think we need to be proactive. With an advertisement on internet you are reaching the ones that are already visible and the ones that are on the merges, they will not know about that. But if you actively change your scoping exercise and look out where they are... so it is for us to find ways of making sure that we are reaching out to those in the emerges.’ ”

Study informant (interviews), funder

<sup>VIII</sup> Human rights funding is defined by Advancing Human Rights, as human rights grantmaking that pursues structural change to ensure the protection and enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights treaties. The definition includes any grant that meets the definition, regardless of whether the funder considers their work to be human rights focused or uses a human rights-based approach in their grantmaking. See <https://www.issue4lab.org/resources/36686/36686.pdf> **10**



- d. Last, but not least, **the feeling of invisibility can be associated to how intersecting work is prioritized in funding for children and youth rights.** Diagram 6. shows that, compared to foundations funding for the intersection between ‘children’s rights—women and girls’ (nearly US\$136 million between 2011 and 2015), the intersection ‘children—people with disabilities, LGBTQI, and sex workers’ has received, combined, about US\$36 million in the same period.

The difficulties in securing funding by groups that focus on the intersection of two or more population groups, and in securing funding to explore how different person’s social and political identities combine to create different systems of oppression and privilege, and transform such systems, has also been documented by previous studies. The research ‘Brave, creative, resilient: the global state of young feminist organizing’ concluded that funders often assume that youth feminists have a single-issue focus, or even a single identity, or group focus, and therefore reduce funding calls which require applicants to identify themselves with a narrow set of themes or activities.<sup>19</sup>

- **Study informants report feeling overwhelmed when mobilizing resources**

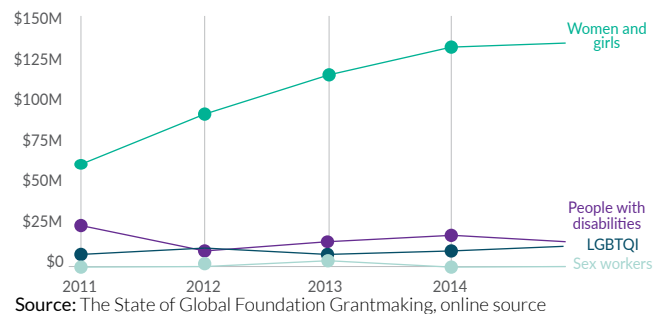
**Long and complicated applications, and other administrative requirements, often overburden organizations and keep them from doing the actual transformative work they believe in.**

Most child- and youth-led community rooted groups are already stretched thin and work with very limited resources, so it is valid to question if it makes sense to ask them to follow complex processes to secure funding. For many organizations, preparing proposals is the biggest challenge they face in mobilizing resources for their work.<sup>21</sup> Unlike large NGOs, these groups do not have large teams of permanent staff—some, in fact, have no paid staff at all—and they certainly do not have professional proposal writers or the means to hire external support. Time is precious for small organizations, and it is important funders recognize this reality when engaging with them.

“It is difficult to obtain funding and the requirements of donors are demanding, it needs a large workload, and sometimes we do not have a human cadre to support these requirements.”

Study informant (survey), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative

**Diagram 6.** Subset of foundation human rights funding for children and youth which supports intersecting work with other population groups (trends 2011–2015)



“‘Because we are the first queer collective of the region, getting funds is a huge challenge. The movement is still nascent here and it is difficult to work in the region given the fact that there is a lot of trivialization of the issue.’

Survey respondent for the study ‘Brave, creative, resilient: the global state of young feminist organizing’ by FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund and Association for Women’s Rights in Development’s Young Feminist Activism Program<sup>20</sup>

“Others talked about the burden of “needy donors” who practise “elimination by complexity”, whereby donor requirements are so complex that they discourage people from applying for funds.”

Learning from a Living Archive: Rejuvenating Child and Youth Rights and Participation

- **Study informants find resource mobilization can have high costs**

Most application processes currently take place online, which is a step forward in terms of access. However, even for those child- and youth-led community rooted groups that have some access to the internet, an online application process might still be inaccessible. Platforms that require heavy data usage or that are not mobile friendly are difficult to access. **In many communities, computers/laptops are luxuries for some and though mobile phones with internet connection might be accessible, for many, actual data is hard to pay for.** Thus, ensuring that platforms used for the process are accessible in these contexts is crucial. Allowing alternative ways to apply or send documentation is

also vital, such as messaging apps (WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, etc), text messaging, email, or in person, through an intermediary organization with presence in the geographical area.

In addition to costs associated to the application process, study informants report facing additional costs that are often overlooked. For instance, in many countries, opening bank accounts can be a burdensome process, which involves having a formal registration as a community-based group or non-governmental organization, and then keeping a deposit and paying running costs such as transaction fees, monthly account management fees, and charges when using the bank card, among others. Requirements and expenses that are easily fulfilled/covered by adult-led organizations are nearly impossible for those led by children or youth.

- **Study informants report high levels of competition for limited funding**

The large majority of study participants engaged in child- and youth-led community rooted groups identified ‘too much competition for limited funding’ as the most significant obstacle to access resources. While there are some limitations for funders to address this—as having an increased number of grassroots organizing is, indeed, a positive trend, and increasing the amount of resources available is not always an option—alternatives such as **redistribution of resources (e.g. by increasing the number of grantees that benefit from the funding available<sup>9</sup>) could help to minimize the levels of competition.** Redistribution, however, is not a perfect solution. It could lead to underfunding initiatives that require, by nature, larger pools of money and, in the long-term, reduce impact. Yet, this could merit dialogue, particularly because in digging into the data about beneficiaries of grants for each funder, some may realize that a significant amount of their resources are staying with INGOs or groups that are not child- and youth-led or centred.

Another alternative cited by informants to reduce the level of competition is the promotion of collaborative initiatives among different grantees. These partnerships should, in no case, be imposed. Nevertheless, many child- and youth-led groups acknowledge that they often have very little information about what other groups are doing; this gap in knowledge could lead to the duplication of efforts, but also to missed opportunities for movement building around certain overlooked topics and joint fundraising.

- **Study informants report that language barriers impact their resource mobilization process**

As many application processes are not available in multiple languages, some study informants cite this as a critical challenge that brings obstacles to their goal of securing funding. This finding aligns with recommendations from recent processes, such as the With and For Girls Collective Evaluation.<sup>22</sup> The report highlighted that language was an ongoing barrier for girls, especially from grassroots organizations, in accessing funding. The report also recommended that the application and communication materials be available in more languages to reach a wider base of groups, in particular from underrepresented regions. **It is important to note that historically marginalized communities and those in remote areas may not speak official, often colonial, languages and may in fact only speak local languages.** Study informants understand that applications in multiple languages contribute to a more inclusive process and aid in levelling the playing field for a diverse range of groups and collectives. Yet, some are worried that including applications in different languages should be matched with the possibility of continuing the funder-grantee relationship in the preferred language. Unfortunately, the costs and potential increased length of the application/selection processes, as more languages are added, could make this aspiration unrealistic.

Problems with language extend beyond prioritizing English or other widely spoken languages. For example, some informants felt they had to use specific terminology in their applications to fit-in and increase their chances of

“Donors are often in partnership with many different organizations that might work in the same area. That would be great if the donor could build up a community of the grantees so we can share and learn experience.”

*Study informant (survey), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative*

<sup>IX</sup> For instance, when looking at foundation funding for children’s rights in 2017 by intersecting populations (i.e., other populations simultaneously supported in grants labelled as children) in the State of Global Foundation Grantmaking data, grants to ‘women and girls’, with an allocation of US\$132 million, represent only 1,500 grants. In contrast, ‘indigenous people’, with an allocation of just over US\$15 million, secured 400 grants. This means that, with nine times a smaller budget, it reaches a significant number of grantees. The latter may mean that the ‘women and girls’ funds could be further redistributed to support more groups.

getting funding. While the study team did not have the opportunity to explore this issue in depth, some study informants felt that the use of words that are more straightforward—widely understood by members of the community—could be frowned upon or seen as if they lack an understanding of certain topics.

Finally, with regards to language—and while not explored in-depth by the study—**there is a huge limitation for some child- and youth-led community rooted groups focused on disabilities to secure funding, due to the lack of accessible information about grant opportunities for individuals with sight and hearing impairment.**

“ We work on issues of violence towards girls and women. Donors want us to call it gender-based violence in general which hides the purpose and the target groups!”

*Study informant (survey), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative*

### **Characteristics of funding available to child- and youth- led community rooted groups**

#### • **The majority of funding available supports restricted projects**

Although some study informants observe changes towards offering grants for movement building and core funding (general costs of the group), their experience indicates that the majority of resources are still intended to support restricted initiatives (other studies labelled this as ‘project-itis’ and highlighted it as a practice that has not worked in the field of children and youth rights and participation<sup>23</sup>). In order to secure the funding, groups are often asked to design a project, in ways that are more typical of larger organizations. Yet, most funders do not offer resources for child- and youth-led community rooted groups to move forward in such processes. For example, by conducting formal needs assessments processes to make a strong case for the needs and challenges they self-identify as critical, or for these groups to follow a process of project design that helps to complete typical application documents (theories of change, logic frameworks, etc.).

Information gathered from funders indicate, of course, that **the limitations of project-based and restricted-funding for child- and youth-led community rooted groups are clear to most of those working in foundations, as there is an understanding that these groups should be able to access flexible funding that allows them to execute their self-defined vision, in changing environments.** In practice, however, funders must follow internal procedures to manage the grant process (including to get buy-in from their boards), which often build on making available standardized documents that clearly outline the expected use of funds.

#### • **The funding available is too little**

The funding available for children and youth work is not enough. Even multilateral agencies struggle to raise the necessary resources to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. In the last quarter of 2019, for instance, UNICEF confirmed that millions of children living in areas affected by conflict and disaster were at risk because of substantial shortages in funding for lifesaving humanitarian programmes. At that moment, UNICEF presented a funding gap of 46 per cent, in order to be able to meet the basic health, education, nutrition, and protection needs of 41 million children in 59 countries.<sup>24</sup> But, more importantly for the focus of this study, **informants perceive that the resources allocated for child- and youth-led community rooted groups is extremely low, as well-established organizations—often INGOs—get a significant portion of the limited funding available.**

Study informants argue that ‘child- and youth-led’ groups are often mischaracterized as having a ‘low capacity to manage funds’. While at times this is true due to lack of technical support and experience with financial management, some of these groups have already been recipients of funding for a few years (sometimes with support from the same group of donors). Regardless of how much they have grown and changed and of their improved capacities to reach larger segments of the community with their innovative work, they are still offered small grants. The dilemma remains for donors with regards to the balance between supporting the sustainability and growth of existing grantees, while at the same time supporting new and overlooked locally-led initiatives.

Another assumption is that ‘child- and youth-led’ work can rely, in the long-term, on volunteerism and, therefore, thrive with smaller grants. It is true that volunteerism fuels a lot of child- and youth-led work (i.e., youth feminist organizing<sup>25</sup>) and that many prefer to remain as volunteer-led groups. However, the requirements for securing funding are so demanding that groups exclusively ran by volunteers struggle to sustain a predictable and regular influx of resources.

- **The funding available supports short-term initiatives**

The majority of study informants acknowledged the short and unpredictable nature of funding available for child- and youth-led work, and the challenges this creates for sustaining change and innovation in the communities and ensuring the survival of groups. Key messages from study participants include:

**a. Channelling resources through INGOs contributes—in many cases—to shortening the funding implementation period.** INGOs have their own procedures and internal timelines, in addition to the commitments agreed with the funder. Resources aimed for child- and youth-led community rooted groups often come a few months after the ‘official starting date’ of the project. The resources must also be used in a shorter period than the grant period, to allow for the INGO to collect data, document work, prepare reports, and comply with other procedures.

**b.** Some child- and youth-led groups wish to stay as ‘non-registered groups’ (for multiple reasons, including not wanting to take on legal responsibility, wishing to remain outside the system, safety concerns, etc.) or they cannot aspire to registration due to the cost or barriers in the administrative process. This reality does not mean that these groups do not require long-term and predictable funding to, therefore, strengthen their self-defined processes and structures, to ensure the group has sustainability mechanisms in place when young adult members move out to other spaces, or to support the development of intergenerational working mechanisms, when members stay in the group, after transitioning to adulthood.

**c. The short-term nature of the funding (and size of the grant) does not always align with the long-term change expected by the funder.** The offer of short-term funding does not match (and somewhat contradicts) the fact that most funders acknowledge that changes around recognition of children and youth human rights take time, as they often link to existing systems of oppression and inequality and to other factors such as poverty, disaster, conflict, etc. The ‘fear’ of not being able to live up to the expectations of change and, sometimes, delays in communication processes from funders or those acting on their behalf (e.g., INGOs) means that groups are often uncertain about the continuation of funding.

- **Some funders are too rigid, offering little adaptation room**

While ‘resilience’ has become a popular concept—and everyone expects and promotes resilience at the community level—study informants among child- and youth-led community rooted groups expressed frustration at the little adaptation room provided by some funders once a project is approved. **Requests for changes in the scope of work or budget allocation by child- and youth-led community rooted groups is seen more as a ‘weakness’** (i.e., lack of experience in project design) than as a product of assessment about emerging strategies that could work better to promote their rights and address their most pressing needs in challenging and changing environments.

“ ‘I have seen donors who think 1,000 dollars will change the world in a few months and I have seen donors who send thousands and thousands of dollars and have no idea about the impact in the ground. Don’t think a few hundred dollars will change the world by tomorrow.’

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Study informant (interview), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative

“ ‘In our experience, to a large extent, grant applications and management requires adherence to a pre-decided plan with little room to incorporate changes based on on-ground situations and developments.’

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Study informant (interview), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative

## A.1.2 Using funders' support: implementation, monitoring, and other elements of accountability

The relationship between child- and youth-led community rooted groups and funders evidently continues beyond the funding allocation. Through the process of using the funds, other detrimental and/or unproductive practices appear (some of those are related to decision-making/power; those will be analysed in more detail in section A.2). With regards to using funders' support, study informants and the literature review yielded key findings, particularly for the areas of technical support and monitoring and accountability.

### Technical support offered by funders

During (and sometimes before and after) the implementation phase, funders are increasingly offering technical support, in the form of trainings, liaising with specialized consultants, opportunities for networking at different levels, invitations to join communities of knowledge, and provision of guidelines on good practices, among others. While not all funders provide this kind of support, the large majority of study informants (funders, non-funders, and child- and youth-led community rooted groups) had direct exposure to this kind of practice, which shows a positive trend in philanthropy.

The study team identified the following as main reasons behind the now widespread practice of offering technical support (among philanthropists, but also within the development and humanitarian sectors more generally):

- a. Genuine interest in supporting capacity building for these groups, and therefore generating opportunities for these groups to self-define areas of growth and improvement and access the necessary tools/training/expertise/platforms. Over the last decades there has been a growing demand by locally-led groups—including child- and youth-led—for support that goes beyond funding.
- b. Cost-effectiveness or value for money considerations and, therefore, a desire to ensure that groups use evidence-based approaches that contribute to adequate management of the limited resources available.

“Financial support is not always seen by the girls as their greatest unmet need nor is it necessarily what they perceive as the most beneficial way other organizations can support them. Other needs identified by girls include support in building up technical and management skills as well as knowledge strengthening.”

*Girls to the front: a snapshot of girl-led organizing by FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund and Mamacash*

“Value for money has become more prominent on the development agenda for a number of inter-related reasons. First, the development community has in the past been driven by performance criteria that are very different from those in other areas of public spending: how much is spent sometimes overshadows the more fundamental question of what the funds achieve. Second, aid agencies are increasingly expected to understand and demonstrate the value for money of their work to those who are paying the bills, i.e., tax payers; philanthropy boards. Third, a number of aid sceptics have claimed that aid does not work, is wasteful, and should be downsized or abolished. Although these claims may not always be based on evidence, strong evidence is needed in order to demonstrate that aid is valid and managed well.”

*Value for money and international development: Deconstructing myths to promote a more constructive discussion by OECD Development Co-operation Directorate*

- c. Interest in ensuring that child- and youth-led community rooted groups are prepared to respond to new trends/demands and, therefore, developing capacities in areas that, while not the key priority of these groups, help them to engage with other donors and development and humanitarian stakeholders in general. For example, policy development, including on child protection and safeguarding; and monitoring systems and data management; other.
- d. More top-down approaches that look into standardizing or aligning the work of grantees to what technical experts, funder's boards of directors, and other stakeholders see as 'ideal organizing'



Comments from study informants indicate that technical support that is driven by the needs and requests of child- and youth-led community rooted groups is likely to get higher acceptability from these groups and, therefore, knowledge and skills will be put in practice for the benefit of children's and youth rights and well-being and movement building. A relationship of trust where youth- and child-led community rooted groups and funders can openly discuss and agree needs, and grantees not feeling like admitting to needs would affect their grants is, therefore, essential to ensure the success of technical support. Qualitative data also indicates that groups also value capacity building opportunities that help them gain visibility and trust from other donors (e.g., in the area of policy development), even if at first it would not come to mind as their key priority.

### **Monitoring and accountability systems in place**

A key process in the funder-grantee relationship is the defining of what constitutes progress/success and the agreement on the processes to account for the use of resources. The study team uncovered the following potentially detrimental or unproductive practices and proposed improvements, with regards to monitoring and accountability:

#### *Measuring progress and success*

- **Definitions such as efficiency, effectiveness, and impact have traditionally been defined by donors and monitoring and evaluation experts in ways that do not necessarily fit in with children and youth organizing.** Thus, it becomes difficult for their groups to showcase the real importance of their work. Representatives from child- and youth-led community rooted groups that engaged in the study indicated that these external definitions of success and impact and how they are measured are yet another manifestation of adultism and the unequal power relationship in philanthropy. Therefore, defining what success and impact means in a particular setting should not be decided by external factors that seek to report only quantitative data. Rather, it should take a comprehensive look at the work and be guided by those implementing it and benefiting from it.
- While it is true that many child- and youth-led organizations may not have complex monitoring and evaluation systems in the way that they are traditionally understood by philanthropy, that does not represent a lack of clarity on what they want to achieve with their work. **Measuring the work of child- and youth-led groups in the communities by a yardstick imposed by external actors unfamiliar with their contexts is seen as counterproductive** and often leads to frustration both for funders as well as for the groups themselves.

“*Let us take some risks. Some donations are so restricted that they inhibit innovation. Innovation happens on the edge of failure and success.*”

*Survey respondent 'Study Pulling back the curtain' by Elevate Children Funders Group<sup>26</sup>*

#### *Reporting success and areas of improvement*

- Strict reporting requirements of traditional funders often places an undue burden on children and youth who may in fact choose to opt out of funding opportunities because they cannot fulfil them, thus becoming a big obstacle for these groups in maintaining funds.<sup>27</sup> Such requirements demand a level of professionalization of the work that is simply not present within these groups; many groups do not, in fact, want that level of professionalization. Further, donors should be mindful of imposing adult-driven processes on young people.
- The work of children and young people is rapidly changing, innovative, and adaptive. In addition, the way in which they capture and document their work may not necessarily align with how adult-led organizations do so. Thus, **there is a demand for donors to listen to their grantees in what the best way for them to report their work** is (videos, blogs, case studies, info graphics, artwork, reports, trustee papers, spreadsheets etc., would also be very beneficial<sup>28</sup>). Extensive written reports are not only burdensome for children and youth, but they may also fail to capture the nuances of their work and the real stories of change and impact behind their work.
- The form or means of reporting is far less important than ensuring that it is flexible, responsive, and appropriate for children and youth and their realities. Study informants recognize that some funders cannot afford to be as flexible as they would like, and if that is the case, it becomes crucial that they can provide their grantees with guidelines in clear and non-technical language. Also, provide them with support and capacity strengthening (and make it clear to potential grantees that this is part of the support they will receive) to ensure compliance.

“

*‘If all funders use flexible reporting formats then the burden on funded organizations should reduce. But if every funder wants quite different information in their report then there is still a risk that the funded organization has to produce very different reports, for all of its funders AND each funder does not really understand the full story of the difference their funding has contributed to making.’<sup>29</sup>*

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*Harmonising Reporting Working Group: Report to the Scotland Funders’ Forum by Evaluation support Scotland*

### **Additional reflections on accountability**

- Some children and youth engaged as informants in this study expressed frustration as funders require their groups to submit report after report about their work, about their finances, and about their institutional capacity. However, grantees often feel that despite all their talk of accountability, funders rarely feel that they need to be accountable to them. They seldom report back to organizations about their work, their processes, and their finances which heavily contributes to reinforcing the unequal relationship between the two.

“

*‘It’s hard to make donors accountable because of their power privileges.’*

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*Study informant (focus group), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative*

## **A.2. Decision-making throughout the philanthropic cycle**

Potentially detrimental and unproductive field practices in the relationship of funders and child- and youth-led community rooted groups are found in key moments, such as accessing and accounting for the use of the resources as described in the section A.1.2. However, a more damaging practice is, at times, at the core of the relationship: power imbalances. Power dynamics are inherent in any relationship mediated by money or other forms of resources. Those who have it hold the power over those who do not have it. And philanthropy is not different. The relation between a funder and any grantee—child- and youth-led or not—is always mediated and determined by the fact that in holding the money, donors hold a more explicit power. However, **grantees are not powerless, as they hold the power to instil lasting change in their communities through their work. Their power may not be financial, it may not even be explicit or tangible, but it is power nonetheless.** Still, it is certainly not a balanced or equal relationship between the two.

The intersecting factor of adultism, which permeates our society, enhances power imbalances in the field of children’s rights. Adults are not only assumed competent when it comes to what is best for children and rights, but, of more significance, they are invested with power<sup>30</sup> over children and young people; and children and young people are divested of power. **Children and young people do have limited space in decision-making instances, and even when they do, they are not recognized as equal.** Children and youth in the Global South, or from marginalized or underprivileged communities in the Global North, are further mistrusted. Within philanthropy, this adultism adds another layer of power which further disempowers children, youth, and their organizations and initiatives and places them in an even more unequal relationship with donors.

The study team acknowledges the importance of power in processes of decision-making around the priorities and pressing needs of children and youth and on how funding is allocated, used, and accounted for. For that reason—and based on the perspective of study participants, including funders, child- and youth-led community rooted groups, and non-funders—the team identified how power manifests in the funder-grantee relationship and its consequences.



## A.2.1. Power manifestations in the funder-grantee relationship

Input from study informants and the literature review on power manifestations has been grouped into four areas:

### Funders think they always know best

The ‘knowing all attitude’ may be present in many funder-grantee relationships, regardless of the geographical location of both parts or the population group. Yet, this concern appears more prominently when study informants reflect on cases where there is a Global North-Global South relationship between funder and grantee. There is a perception among some study informants that, traditionally, philanthropy from the Global North has thought of itself as knowing what is best for marginalized communities in the Global South. This sentiment is powered by the tendency to believe that successful interventions in the North can and should be replicated by the South, and by the fact that a lot of what is known about challenges and needs in the South come from evidence generated in the North. When there is awareness that, in addition, adults are invested with the power to know what is best for children and youth, it is easy to see the level of inequality present in the relationships between funders and child- and youth-led groups in the Global South. As external actors, **funders will always be learners, and will most likely never fully comprehend the complexities and nuances of the particular communities they wish to support.**<sup>31</sup>

Diagram 6. Keywords identified by study informants on power manifestations



### Some funders promote one-size fit all solutions

The tendency in the international development sector to promote blanket solutions—without considering the characteristics, needs, and preferences of local communities—is not new. There are multiple examples in the rights, development, and humanitarian sectors of how this leads to failure and waste of resources. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, study informants acknowledge that some funders often promote these blanket solutions in their grantmaking by pre-defining key strategies to be utilized as part of a project. Sometimes this is done in a very subtle way—such as suggesting a group pilots an initiative they have seen succeeding in a different context—and sometimes it comes as an obvious mandate in the form of a prerequisite to access the funding.

The challenge for funders remains on how to strike the balance between supporting exchange, facilitating documentation and dissemination of good and emerging practices, and use of evidence-based approaches, while at the same time ensuring that priorities and strategies are set by children and youth.

### Some funders are unwilling to let go of control

The study team has identified that ‘risk’ is a central element in the process of power-sharing. By maintaining control of central decisions, funders may feel they are able to do the following:

- Guarantee that field work is aligned with their strategy priorities and that they can be accountable to philanthropists.
- Keep their reputation.
- Maintain their ability to operate in a specific context. For instance, for some funders it is important to maintain a positive relationship with local authorities or community leaders to enable the execution of some of their funding.
- Prevent mismanagement or waste of resources.

“ ‘Grantmakers are often discouraged by their institutions to take risks, for reasons that have to do with reputation and institutional dynamics. This tendency is deeply embedded and tenacious, because it is not made transparent.’

*Giving with trust: how philanthropy can transform power relations by  
Open Global Rights*

While these concerns are valid and, in some cases, fuelled by previous negative experiences (i.e., scandals related to lack of child protection policies and safeguarding in the cooperation sector), study informants question the limited interpretation of risk. It seems that, at times, **funders over-focus on the risk of not having good enough numbers to show in the short-term, and forget about the risk of not reaching the maximum social impact through their work.** Risk-averse institutions must question how they understand risk, what is behind it, and how it can be reassessed and adapted to more comprehensively relate to their work and the impact they are aiming for. For example, funders who want to be perceived as innovative game changers should consider if the risk of changing their grantmaking practices and not obtaining the desired results is off-set by the learning opportunity it offers and the ability to lead the field in considering more participatory alternatives.

As funders navigate potential solutions to let go of control and, at the same time, manage risk adequately, study informants considered it important for child- and youth-led community rooted groups to be made aware of these fears transparently. That way, they can also contribute to solutions from a local perspective.

### **Some funders impose abusive or intrusive requirements**

The study team identified that the power of holding the money not only impacts decision-making power over who should get the money or what should get funded. Rather, it also extends into how the work should get done, and even how the group should organize itself. This overexertion of power can be extremely toxic, as many community groups and NGOs have denounced. It can result in, for example, imposing unrealistic, excessive, and abusive requirements such as the requirement to hire expensive consulting firms, the use of the organization's logo without their consent, or thousands of dollars in legal expenses due to constant contract changes.

“ ‘A donor requested we turn our female employees into volunteers in order to “make our organization more financially sustainable”. Obviously, we said no.’<sup>33</sup>

*Informant, survey published by the World Economic Forum*

The abuse of power does not necessarily have to reach such toxic levels and can, in fact, seem harmless and even well-intentioned while still being intrusive, condescending, and—in the case of child- and youth-led work—adult-centrist. Such is the case, for example, when funders include pre-established organizational development paths (registration, development of a strategic plan, creating a fixed organizational structure, others) for groups and organizations as part of their support without consulting grantees if that is in fact something they are interested in. **It is paramount for funders to recognize that their institutional models are not by default the correct or appropriate ones for all of their grantees, especially child- and youth-led groups.**

### **A.2.2. Consequences of power imbalances**

The consequences of power imbalances can be grouped into six areas, based on the information gathered through this study:

- **The right to be heard, where does it start?** When funders refuse—consciously or unconsciously—to bring in the voices of children and youth throughout the whole philanthropic cycle, they are not behaving any different than the communities, authorities, or local systems that impose barriers to the realization of children's and youth rights to participation. Providing resources to a child- and youth-led community rooted group to advocate for the recognition of youth agency and the set-up of spaces for active consultation, while at the same time ignoring those voices in the process of needs assessment or project design in the relationship funder-grantee, diminishes children's and youths' legitimacy and reinforces misconceptions about their capacities and contributions. Ultimately, it is counterproductive to the fight for the recognition of children's and youth rights. Meaningfully and consciously engaging children and youth within

“ ‘The question of the purpose of participation is really key...“why is this important.” If you ask about why participation is important, most come up with reasons of effectiveness. I was so shocked and surprised that people didn't mention participation as a human right as the very first reason. That, to me, should be the starting point of this conversation.’

*Interviewee, Participatory Philanthropy: Six Foundations' Journeys by Elevate Children Founders Group*<sup>34</sup>

funder programming and grantmaking and ensuring they have a seat at the decision-making table will contribute to them owning and reclaiming their rights, not only in their grantmaking relationships with funders, but also within their communities as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

- **Contribution to other systems of oppression:** community rooted groups, including those led by children and youth, are likely to involve (and target) individuals that, due to intersecting oppressions, are left behind from development and humanitarian action and more likely to suffer human rights violations. Although being community rooted does not offer a guarantee of inclusion—e.g., children and youth-led groups may be male dominated—there is a higher chance of diverse representation. When funders ignore the voice of children and youth in the process of grantmaking, they are missing the opportunity to fight compounding systems of oppression. For many children and youth, participation in these groups, joining a safe space for dialogue, and decision-making generated/supported by a funder, may be the only opportunity to speak up about their particular needs and how gender, race, sexual orientation, and other factors shape their realities.
- **Missed opportunities to enhance agency:** when children's and youth's leadership potential and capacity is not truly recognized by funders and other actors—by engaging them as core decision-makers—funders are missing opportunities to cultivate their skills as leaders and change agents, which will allow them to later wield their collective power to transform the systems that perpetuate inequality. Thus, working to rebalance the power within philanthropy ultimately has the potential to contribute to correcting the power imbalance between communities and structures of power.<sup>36</sup>
- **Missed opportunities to learn from these population groups:** by not engaging in horizontal dialogues with children and young people, funders are missing a unique opportunity to learn directly from them—without the use of expensive needs assessments or other formative studies—about their views and perceptions, ways of communication, understanding of the dynamics of their communities, and demands. Horizontal spaces for participation give room for children and young people to self-define priorities based on their lived experiences as experts on the issues that affect them and their communities. Expertise does not always come from fancy degrees, from high ticket universities, and it is certainly not always held by intellectuals in the Global North. Children and youth are experts on the issues that concern them. They can certainly benefit from support in strengthening their skills and knowledge, but they do not need someone thousands of kilometres away to tell them what their needs are or how to address them. It is time to recognize lived experience as valuable expertise that should guide programming and grantmaking.
- **Limited effectiveness and impact:** while the realization of the right to be heard should not be dependant of its added-value to programming and effectiveness, the consideration of its contribution is always on the table. As already explained in this report, evidence indicates child and youth engagement contributes to more impactful programmes and improved outcomes at community level.<sup>37 38</sup>
- **Limited trust:** when community organizations do not feel trusted in their capacity to lead and contribute, they also feel like they cannot be honest and transparent about their work with funders. They do not feel comfortable coming forward and sharing their needs and challenges, their lessons learned, and their changes in course. This is detrimental for the organizations, for the funders, and for the work. It is unfair and unrealistic for funders to expect transparency from their partners when they do not offer them the same.

“ ‘When there is trust, it encourages the ability to make mistakes in the path of change, and recognizing mistakes is an important element in the learning process.’ ”

Study informant (survey), child- and youth-led community rooted group representative

## Section B. Participatory philanthropy in the field of children and youth rights



*'Real participatory philanthropy begins with the people who are most affected by or closest to the challenge or opportunity. Grantees MUST NOT be seen as "grantees" or "implementers" or "project partners"—they need to be seen as the CORE of all decisions. Communities themselves cannot be seen as beneficiaries or participants—they must be the DRIVERS. What do we mean by seeing them as DRIVERS at the CORE of all decisions and action? They (CBOS, communities, and children) should define the problems or opportunities that are the greatest for them. They should be given time and support to understand that problem deeply in their own way. They need to decide if and how they are going to tackle the problem. They get to decide what the "change" or "impact" will be and what activities they and others need to do to get there. They should decide what should be measured in order to ensure whether the impact/change has been achieved.'*

*Interviewee, Participatory Philanthropy: Six Foundations' Journeys by  
Elevate Children Funders Group <sup>39</sup>*

Based on study findings, practices to address potentially detrimental and unproductive field practices that go against a more participatory philanthropy can be grouped around six categories:<sup>X</sup>

- Acknowledging and rebalancing power.
- Bearing the 'burden'.
- Amplifying the voices of children and young people.
- Offering flexible funding.
- Implementing participatory grantmaking.
- Engaging children and youth beyond the grantmaking cycle.

The common denominator in all these recommended practices is that they focus on putting child- and youth-led community rooted groups in the centre of decision-making.

### B.1. Acknowledging and rebalancing power



*'The most powerful use of power, with the greatest consequent impact on grantmaking, is when its imbalance is openly acknowledged, when co-inquiry is set at the heart of the imbalance, when the power is shared.'*

*Power Imbalance and the Program Work of Philanthropy by Craig  
McGarvey <sup>40</sup>*

On the side of the funder, study informants recommend the following:

- Being aware that child- and youth-led community groups may have a 'troubled' relationship with philanthropy. Some may identify funders as contributors to inequality and marginalization—due to the history of colonization, racism, and ruthless capitalism that have led to amassing large fortunes<sup>41</sup>—as well as potential partners in creating lasting change.

<sup>X</sup> The study team acknowledges that while the practices below are presented in the form of 'new' recommendations, many funders are already actively implementing—and evaluating—these types of efforts. When available to the public domain, results of such evaluations are discussed when presenting the recommendations.

- Being aware of the multiple and complex factors that contribute to power imbalances in a relationship with children and youth. The gender, age, and race—among other considerations—of those who represent funders can, in different situations, exacerbate or minimize negative power dynamics.
- Recognizing children and youth as equals, which means promoting relationships of mutual learning.
- Preparing for intergenerational work. Children and youth regularly collaborate with adults either within their organizations or in their communities. They recognize the value of intergenerational work and welcome such opportunities for collaboration, as long as they are respected and their work is taken seriously.<sup>42</sup>
- Understanding that the power that funders hold is not inherently bad and, in fact, has the potential to affect some real change at different levels. Power in philanthropy for children's rights is not only about shifting decision-making to children and youth. It is also about wielding the power they hold to benefit their grantees and partners as well as the sector as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

“It is often thought of as the power that they hold over their grantees and their communities but it is in fact much greater than that. Foundations also have the power to act, innovate, and take risks granted by their financial independence. Finally, they have the power to collaborate and build with others in the field to promote collective action.”<sup>44</sup>

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*A rebalancing act: How funders can address power dynamics by NPC*

- Establishing and maintaining relationships of trust and mutual accountability with grantees. Having clear and open lines of communication where funders are available, respond quickly, request feedback, and are genuine in their desire to hear what the group's need are highly valued by informants.
- Accepting to meet children and youth on their own terms, whatever that means in their particular context (using WhatsApp, having flexible hours, using language that is youth-friendly, etc.).
- Diversifying decision makers both within staff and boards of directors at funder institutions as well by engaging communities directly, especially children and youth.
- Engaging children and youth beyond sharing 'youth experiences'. Their perspectives and views should inform the definition of key concepts such as results, impact, expertise, and accountability.

On the side of children and youth leading local work, this involves:

- Breaking the silence by voicing demands for participation in decision-making spaces.
- Sharing honest feedback with funders and requesting theirs throughout the relationship. This includes not only the grantmaking process but the implementation of the work.
- Working collectively with other child- and youth-led groups in the community and beyond to educate funders on the best way to support locally-led initiatives.

## B.2. Bearing the 'burden'

Participatory practices that move away from tokenism require time, resources, systems in place, flexibility, and the capacity to get immersed in a process of constant transformation. The 'burden' of generating the conditions for these changes should be borne by funders. Study informants shared some potential actions that funders could employ, which include:

- **Provide capacity building support:** bringing children and youth into adult spaces without the necessary support often sets them up for failure and may create frustration and distrust. When including children and young people in their processes, funding institutions must bear the burden of adapting said processes so that they are responsive to them. In addition, capacity strengthening support must be provided as needed for participants. When unsure if it is needed and how, ask! Asking a young person to sit on the board of directors is pointless and counterproductive if they have no support in understanding the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities associated so they can participate and contribute. It is not about putting children and youth in adult spaces and expecting them to somehow thrive there (and making

them responsible when they do not). Rather, the purpose is to make these spaces more responsive to them, friendlier, more adapted to the way in which children and youth organize, act, think, and feel comfortable. In considering how to adapt their processes to children and youth, funders must, of course, consult them and allow them to guide the process.

- **Adapt systems and procedures:** all processes associated to securing, receiving, and accounting for the use of funds should be simplified, following a consultative process. This may entail using local foundations to reach out to unregistered children and youth groups, reducing the amount and frequency of reporting, liaising with other funders working with the same grantees to unify reporting requirements/templates, and remaining accessible to provide support to grantees as needed in fulfilling reporting requirements.
- **Do not ignore language barriers:** ensuring that the application is available in languages that children and youth feel comfortable communicating in, in the specific geographical areas invited to apply. If this is not an option, funders should provide alternatives for children and youth. For example, have staff members or community representatives that speak their language and can provide support with translation or interpretation.
- **Cover the cost:** finally, it is important to consider the resources that may be required for children and youth engagement. Most funders acknowledge and cover the most obvious expenses, e.g., travel expenses to attend consultative processes. However, only some cover children and young people's time to share their expertise. In addition, not all funders consider that as online processes become more popular—even more because of COVID-19—children and youth may need money to pay for basic things, such as data, computers, and adaptations to the sites where they operate from, to guarantee more privacy.

#### Positive example

Many international stakeholders face legal and financial challenges in supporting unregistered groups due to the lack of financial and legal accountability. To overcome this barrier, some foundations often use regional or local partners such as funds like Fondo Lunaria in Colombia, the Women's Fund in Georgia, Filia in Germany, and Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM) in Nicaragua, or well established women's and youth and/or girl-centred organizations to reach grassroots unregistered organizations. <sup>45</sup>

Girls to the front: a snapshot of girl-led organizing by FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund and Mamacash

#### Positive example

FRIDA, for instance, promotes an application and review process accessible in seven different languages: Arabic, English, French, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. This has heavily contributed to greater access to organizations around the world accessing their grantmaking processes as expressed by grantees themselves.

The Fund for Global Human Rights and Purposeful, for example, considered it when they launched their grantmaking process in Sierra Leone, and opted to make applications available in English as well as in Krio.

Girls to the front: a snapshot of girl-led organizing by FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund and Mamacash

## B.3. Amplifying children and youth voices by supporting movement building

Study informants highlight the importance of funders creating opportunities for movement building, to ensure the voices of children and young people are taken seriously. Children and youth organizations interviewed and surveyed welcome the opportunity of donors to connect them with like-minded groups. In general, they find such exchanges to be helpful, constructive, and inspiring. They also appreciate the opportunity to network with other youth organizations who may be working on similar issues whether in their own contexts or beyond. However, it was also noted that funders should be careful about what they hope to achieve when they create these spaces for organizations to meet and exchange. The attention should remain on the groups themselves, and funders should make sure they do not impose their agendas. Movement building is certainly a powerful idea that supports the agency of children and youth, and one increasingly used and discussed in the development sector. Yet it is vital that funders be mindful not to co-opt the movement they support. In fact, not all groups they support may wish to participate in existing movements or lead the creation of new ones.

Keeping in mind the following recommendations provided by study informants for funders can ensure a participatory approach to movement building:

- Engage child- and youth-led organizations to mutually assess if there is an interest in creating these spaces and designing them jointly.
- Ensure that when such platforms are created, it is children and youth who are setting the agenda and defining its objectives and expected results.



- Provide context to children and youth about regional and international movements that may be of interest to them in a friendly and open manner, and connect them with others, if that is of interest to them.
- Support children and youth in participating in spaces and movements that are important to them, even if not organized by funders.

## B.4. Flexible funding

The very nature of childhood and youth is that it is constantly changing. As such, groups led by children and youth change and evolve rapidly, learning, improving, and adapting as they go. As such, their needs and challenges may also change rapidly, and funders should aim to adapt to them. Children and young people are generally not afraid of change, they are eager to learn and to innovate.

One key strategy recommended by study informants involves funders implementing flexible funding. Supporting children and young people means believing in them and their organizations and dreams, not just on the specific action that they may implement. Providing flexible funding is an important way of demonstrating that trust and belief. The best way to ensure flexible funding is by responding to the needs of organizations while still meeting the requirements of funders. Also, by establishing open lines of communication between the two, where issues that arise can be discussed honestly and addressed together. Another alternative is visiting the communities and potential groups to be supported (or that funders are already supporting). Gaining a better understanding of the context will help funders trust the decisions made by children and youth about their priorities and needs.

## B.5. Participatory grantmaking

Before discussing the potential benefits of participatory grantmaking, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations to assess this practice. First, only a limited number of informants has been exposed to this new model pioneered by some funders. Second, the information available in the public domain regarding the evaluation of the practice is limited, either because evaluation processes are under way, or because those who commission them prefer to maintain the reports offline for the purpose of confidentiality. Therefore, the study team acknowledges that the recommendations included herein on participatory grantmaking do not necessarily cover all the aspects of the practice.

Participatory grantmaking promotes an alternative funding model to disrupt and democratize philanthropy,<sup>50</sup> as it addresses the unequal power dynamics between funder and grantee, shifting power in grantmaking decisions from foundations to the people most affected and who have first-hand knowledge and experience on the issues being sought to address. Inclusiveness, collaboration, diversification of decision-making, moving beyond simple consultation and feedback to full ownership and locally-led decision-making are cited by study informants and the literature<sup>51 52 53</sup> as guiding principles of the model. In the context of children's rights, the model aims for the shift in power not only from donors to grantees, and affected populations by the issues it is trying to address, but also from an adult-centred to a child- and youth-centred approach.

### Positive example

Fondo Lunaria, a feminist fund that mobilizes resources to strengthen organizations of young women in Colombia, provides networking opportunities as part of its awards package. This kind of non-financial support is highly valued as it allows young women to meet other girl activists from around the country, learn from them, and find opportunities to collaborate and support each other.<sup>46</sup>

By Fondo Lunaria

### Positive examples

Mama Cash, for example, has created a special set of funds which are usually smaller in size, more flexible, including funding for core and longer-term support to make sure that they meet the needs of these groups and to enable them to plan ahead, and respond to new challenges and opportunities. These set of funds were co-created with the grantees, to ensure that the application and requirements do not over-burden them, and that they are also integrating non-financial support, sharing knowledge and networking opportunities, along the way.<sup>47</sup>

Investing in Youth Impact By CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

The Fund for Global Human Rights, for example, provides financial and strategic support to grassroots leaders and groups by funding small organizations that are not able to register or cannot open a bank account through flexible funding for activist-driven solutions.<sup>48</sup>

Institutional website, Fund for Global Human Rights

The Global Resilience Fund also provides fully flexible, rapid response grants to registered and unregistered, community-based organizations and informal collectives led by girls and young women under the age of 30, from all regions and all countries, including cis girls, trans girls, intersex and non-binary youth, gender non-conforming youth, gender queer youth, and any girl-identified youth.<sup>49</sup>

The Global Resilience Fund for Girls and Young Women: A collective response to the COVID-19 crisis



Benefits of implementing this practice, as revealed by data collected through this study, include the following:

- ✓ **It contributes to sound grantmaking decisions.** Involving affected populations in funding decisions leads to more informed and more effective philanthropic investments and outcomes, and it increases participants' sense of agency, ownership, power, and leadership.<sup>54</sup>
- ✓ **It helps to strengthen the trust and credibility** between funders and grantees, helping to dismantle their inherent power relation by placing them on a closer level and increasing their mutual accountability.
- ✓ **It contributes to strengthening the capacities** among grantees, building solidarity among grant-seekers and peer review panellists, and functioning as a learning opportunity for all involved.<sup>55</sup>
- ✓ **It increases agency and self-esteem among those who participate,** as they see, in a very tangible way, how their voice matters to funders. This is also the result of the recognition that those engaged in decision-making about grants gain among their peers and members of the community. Young people interviewed said gaining recognition from peers holds special meaning for them because it reinforces the importance of their work, and gives them confidence to keep working. It is inspiring for them to know that others like them believe in what they do and recognize their efforts to instil change.
- ✓ **Having affected populations within decision-making spaces who can better understand the needs and solutions presented by children and youth means that some groups can aspire to secure funding for the first time.** Some of these community rooted groups struggle to transmit the value of their work during grantmaking processes, which makes it difficult for them to obtain resources.

Challenges or areas of concern identified include:

- It can be difficult to ensure **representativeness** in participatory grantmaking processes and it, in fact, does not eliminate the potential for bias.
- It requires a **shift in the institutional culture,** priorities, and regulations of the funder, as well as the willingness and ability to sacrifice control in decision-making which can prove difficult, especially in more traditional institutions. As such, building internal consensus can be a challenge that should not be undervalued, and working together with staff and the board to ensure institutional buy-in is a necessary and vital step before any participatory grant making process can be considered.
- **It can take more time and incur in more costs than traditional grantmaking.** However, there is currently no research to suggest that participatory grantmaking does take longer and incurs more costs than traditional grantmaking.<sup>56</sup> In fact, according to Lafayette Practice, while it may seem expensive, the process is also cost effective in many ways.<sup>57</sup> Here, again, participatory grantmaking leads to questioning how efficiency is defined, and whether a traditional understanding that focuses only on money and time spent is sufficient when attempting to impact real change.
- Children and youth want to be heard and want to participate in decision-making processes that affect them. However, **they may not be interested in participation as adults envision it.** Sitting on a board of directors or making final decisions about grantmaking may not be something of interest to children or youth in certain circumstances and may, in fact, overburden them. This does not mean that children and youth cannot or should not participate in these processes but that these

#### Positive examples

Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres is a pioneer in participatory grantmaking and providing resources for young women's rights organizing. The fund believes young women are best at selecting the projects that will benefit them and their communities. Their *PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING* has an open call for proposals, with grant applications later anonymized and potential grantees selecting the organizations they believe should receive the funding.<sup>58</sup>

Investing in Youth Impact By CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

#### Positive examples

FRIDA, The Young Feminist Fund uses a process where applicants, girls, young women, and trans youth determine the priorities for funding in their own context by reviewing applications, voting, and determining where funding goes. Their core grants are awarded as flexible funds, which allows groups to define their own budgets and use the funds however they see fit. In addition to core grants, FRIDA's participatory funding model also provides different types of support and resources to community members to aid them in different aspects of their work and institutional development.<sup>59</sup> FRIDA further involved past grantees in their strategic planning and has a group of regional advisors—also young feminists—who guide their processes, support their grantmaking initiatives, and create robust learning networks for peers.<sup>60</sup> According to FRIDA, 'participatory processes enable clear connections between communities and movements, offering concrete opportunities for mutual learning for grantmakers and grant-seekers.'<sup>61</sup>

IWhy Let Go of Power? By Grant Craft

processes need to be adapted and responsive to them. Some children and youth interviewed expressed, for example, that they did not feel that decision-making about who would ultimately receive funding should be their responsibility. They may want to participate in processes, but it is worth asking if it is fair to expect them to make decisions that highly-paid professional staff at funding organizations often struggle to make, as there are so many aspects to be considered.

- The practice of participatory grantmaking may require additional efforts with regards to accountability and communication. Even organizations that were involved in the decision-making process interviewed as part of this research expressed that they often felt they were not kept in the loop once their role had ended and that they did not hear back from donors about how the process had concluded and the grants were awarded. Likewise, applicants, even even those shortlisted, are often not informed when not selected and seldom is feedback provided.

### Positive examples

The Fund for Global Human Rights has recently launched a participatory grantmaking process (Tar Kura) for young people in Sierra Leone in collaboration with local partner Purposeful. The process created a youth panel (formed through an open call) that led the decision-making process, ultimately deciding which youth initiatives would receive support. The panellists, as well as the selected organizations, also received capacity strengthening support from Purposeful. As the grant period for implementation of the youth initiatives coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, a high degree of flexibility was necessary to allow young people to respond to the most pressing issues in their community. The FGHR is dipping their toes into PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING with this first initiative and, as such, has invested significantly in documenting the process and its learnings and it hopes to use them to guide future grantmaking processes. It is also conducting a participatory evaluation process of the Tar Kura initiative.

Institutional social networks, Purposeful

### Positive examples

The With and For Girls collective is a unique collaboration between 11 funders united by a common belief that girls are agents of change. The participatory grantmaking process of their annual awards includes girl-led regional judging panels made up of adolescent girls from the region and facilitated by previous winners who review applications and select winners. Members of the panels are 'supported through a training process where they learn about the lives of girls across their region, the contexts they live in, and how to analyse nominees' applications'.<sup>62</sup> The WAFG collective also commissioned an independent participatory evaluation of their processes where girls received training and support to become full members of the evaluation team. According to the collective, the findings of the evaluation were key in re-shaping their Awards process and they hope it will also encourage other actors to take similar steps in placing girls at the centre of their funding practices.

Girls, the Agents of Change: Lessons from a Collaborative Approach to Funding With and For Girls By Purposeful

## B.6. Going beyond the grantmaking cycle

Children and youth who participated in the study heavily valued when relationships with funders extended beyond the grantmaking cycle. Knowing that the funders were there for them beyond the transactional aspect of their relationship was of particular importance to them. Thus, offering them other opportunities to advance their work, and putting them in touch with other organizations and funders reinforces a relationship beyond the exchange of funds. Organizations also heavily valued the capacity development that funders could offer them as needed. For example, in managing the funds received, preparing proposals, or learning how to best showcase their work.

Ultimately, **grantees want to feel, and rightfully so, that funders believe in them and their dreams.** They want funders to go beyond supporting a specific initiative or project and, instead, to support them and their vision for change. As such, several studies have found that the greatest unmet need for children and youth is not always financial support. Also, that they welcome and appreciate donors that support not only their work but, more generally, the existence of their group. **Support that ranges from capacity development, networking opportunities, strengthening of management skills, exchanges and collaborations, and knowledge sharing are all highly valuable for children and youth.**<sup>63</sup> These types of support would also heavily contribute to the sustainability and autonomy of groups and organizations.

## Conclusions

The work of supporting child- and youth-led community rooted groups has advanced significantly in recent years. However, the message from study informants and other research is clear and strong: there is still much work to be done at different levels. A real participatory philanthropy will engage grantees and communities at all levels, in the board of directors, as part of the staff, in strategic planning including agenda setting, in designing grantmaking and evaluation processes, and resource mobilization, etc. The task is not easy and requires, among other things, navigating some uncharted territories, conducting a thorough process of self-assessment and humbleness on the side of each funder, and bringing other stakeholders in the development and humanitarian sectors on board.

This section offers a brief overview of the study team's perspective of potential challenges and dilemmas for funders, as they embark on a journey of transformation. In addition, it provides additional recommendations to promote transformation within philanthropy and finding support to address unproductive field dynamics and power imbalances across the donor sector.

## Potential dilemmas and challenges

### Participatory philanthropy and child protection

While the interest for children and youth participation continues to increase from funders, the push towards child protection and child safeguarding also spreads through the development and humanitarian sectors. The move towards child protection and safeguarding comes after numerous abuse cases and scandals from around the globe have shaken the development and humanitarian sectors. Also, as the need to protect and safeguard children and vulnerable adults becomes a priority for organizations at all levels. The need to ensure the well-being of children and youth and to make sure safe spaces are created for them when they come into contact with development and humanitarian personnel is undeniable. However, it does pose the reflection of how some of these policies may in fact hinder children and youth participation.

The movement for child safeguarding and protection stems from a recognition that children are vulnerable and require protection. And, indeed, they may be. But focusing the interactions with children and youth on their vulnerability and need for protection runs the very real risk of promoting paternalistic attitudes about them. It is not always easy to give full participation and recognize the autonomy of a group we have deemed to require special protection.

For example, requiring parental or guardian consent or presence for children to participate in activities and events, can certainly help to ensure their safety (assuming, with this, that parents and guardians offer, in all cases, a safety base for children). However, it can potentially hinder some children's participation. Children, youth, and especially girls aiming to organize often do it despite the lack of support and, sometimes, the outright opposition of families and communities. Many times, they are organizing to change the stereotypes and adultism that prevent their organizing. In such cases, requiring parental or guardian authorization to participate may be counterproductive and, in fact, prevent their participation. In other cases, the presence of guardians or parents may condition the meaningful engagement of children who may not be comfortable with fully engaging while their parents are in the room.

Funders and organizations working with children and youth must work to find a balance between ensuring their safeguarding and protection—with the corresponding policies and protocols necessary—while making sure that this does not contribute to reinforcing patriarchal attitudes towards children and youth and hinder their meaningful participation. In this regard, funders and organizations are encouraged to consider alternative mechanisms of protection for children that do not interfere with their participation, such as assessing each case individually, or ensuring protection and safeguarding trainings also emphasize the autonomy of children and steer clear of reinforcing adultism and paternalism.

### Locally-led decisions in a world of evidence-based programming

The movement in the development and humanitarian sectors towards more evidence-based and results-oriented programming certainly poses challenges for child- and youth-led groups and organizations in the field; often, they report not having the capacity to conduct needs-assessments and demonstrate evidence of the impact of their work. However, large donors and other actors are unlikely to step away from this approach, nor should they. Gathering and considering evidence of what works and what does not and why it is crucial in working towards lasting social change and evidence points to the fact that interventions that are carefully planned and well-resourced have better outcomes.<sup>64</sup> Thus, these practices—which the field has worked hard (and continues doing so) to mainstream into programming at all levels—should not be abandoned.

Local knowledge and expertise are incredibly powerful, and it is important that funders and other external stakeholders acknowledge their value. However, this knowledge can certainly be complemented, enhanced, and strengthened with a broader understanding of how local problems fit into larger, regional, and international challenges and how other groups around the world have worked to address them. Children and young people acknowledge this and, when asked (including as part of this study), often express that they want to know more about how others are working. They recognize the learning opportunities and find inspiration in the work of others.

In this regard, funders have often missed the opportunity to share the knowledge acquired, the lessons learned, the demonstrated results, and the good practices with other funders and grantees. They can also support them in gaining a better understanding of how their local work can fit into larger regional and international agendas and be supported by existing evidence. Finally, they can contribute to efforts to generate that evidence when it does not exist and to advocate for this evidence to be recognized and valued by other actors in the field.

## Where to start? There is no magic recipe

The level of engagement and participation of children, youth, and their communities within funding institutions will undoubtedly not be the same for all funders. Not all funders are prepared to share power at the same level and to open up all their spaces and processes. However, it is crucial to first recognize the importance of this rebalancing of power and assess where each institution lies with regards to their relationship to their grantees and the communities they aim to support. Such a reflection will aid in identifying the overall willingness and buy-in within the institution and the best course of action. Drafting a realistic plan of action with deadlines and tangible results will ensure that the process translates into real change within the institution. However, it is important to recognize that a real difference will require a culture change within the institution and, as such, it will not happen overnight. It is not necessary or realistic for funders to completely change their grantmaking practices and internal culture all of a sudden. Each institution has a different starting point, and a different end point they should aim for, depending on what is doable for them at this particular time (to be reassessed in the future). Drastic changes in grantmaking practices may not be viable, but baby steps can always be taken by piloting new processes in smaller or more controlled settings. An initial internal example of participatory philanthropy will serve to secure institutional buy-in for bigger initiatives.

## COVID-19 and its impact on participatory philanthropy

While this research was being conducted, the global COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The unexpected pandemic diverged attention from most actors in the development and humanitarian sectors away from their regular work refocusing them on the ensuing pandemic and its impact. Most grassroots groups—including child- and youth-led—continued and even increased their work to serve their communities in the wake of this pandemic; INGOs also scrambled to increase the support to the communities and organizations that they support to better prepare people to face this pandemic. Meanwhile, the philanthropic community reassessed the best way to reach those they seek to support.

The pandemic remains an evolving situation, and the final impact it will have on the world and on the development, humanitarian, and philanthropic sectors is yet to be seen, but this historic moment presents an opportunity to reassess practices and beliefs by the sector. However, it is important to recognize the early signs of how the pandemic has in fact encouraged more the reflection about current grantmaking practices and how effective those may or may not be in emergency situations such as this one.<sup>65</sup> For example, according to the Council on Foundations, almost 800 foundations have pledged to streamline their grantmaking processes to ensure funding reaches communities faster and more efficiently and committing to provide more unrestricted funding and increasing flexibility in their grantmaking process.<sup>XI</sup> At the same time, over 300 funders signed a statement by London Funders committing to greater flexibility in their grantmaking practices and pledging to better listen to and learn from civil society.<sup>XII</sup> Future Foundation UK also posted a briefing paper denouncing the power dynamics still present in relationships between funders and communities of colour, which include a lack of trust and burdensome practices, and including a call to action and practical recommendations to promote more equitable approaches to philanthropy.<sup>66</sup> The launch of the Global Resilience Fund for Girls and Young Women is yet another example already covered in this report.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>XI</sup> For the full pledge visit: <https://www.cof.org/news/call-action-philanthropys-commitment-during-covid-19>

<sup>XII</sup> For the full statement and the list of signatories visit: <https://covid19funders.org.uk/>

## Bringing others on board

At first, making the case for the implementation of more participatory practices in the philanthropic sector focused on children, human rights, and development —particularly for practices that put child- and youth-led community rooted groups in the centre of decision-making—seems a relatively ‘easy’ job, considering that the well-being of children is a major priority of the international community. This was indicated by the importance given in the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Goals, and the 35 SDG indicators that relate directly to children and youth. Also, the fact that the need and value of engaging children and youth in defining solutions for their well-being and that of their communities is also widely accepted in global frameworks. However, translating that priority into practical efforts and into additional allocations of resources for locally-led initiatives will take time and commitment on the side of funders.

Potential actions:

- **Dialogue.** Spaces such as ECFG and other funding collectives provide opportunities for joint reflection on these issues and for funders to share their experiences with this work and to reflect on how they can collaborate moving forward. Some of the recommendations included in this report allude to the importance of coordinated efforts by funders (i.e., in application formats, reports, or networking opportunities). Thus, it will be important for funders at all levels to consider how such collaborations can happen and to share their lessons learned. ECFG has begun initial conversations to prompt joint reflection on participatory philanthropy, particularly child and youth participation. ECFG members are encouraged to engage with the Secretariat to identify the most effective ways for members and external partners to share learning and coordinate. Beyond spaces such as ECFG, generating dialogue opportunities with top bilateral and multilateral donors and foundation funders supporting children and youth is essential.
- **Mapping.** ECFG can support the mapping of the level of funding and amount of grants available to support children and youth work. However, it is important to ensure that such mapping is regularly updated and that it incorporates a filter that indicates ‘by type of group/organization receiving funding’ in order to monitor how child- and youth-led community rooted groups are benefitting from the funding available.
- **Consultation.** It would, of course, make no sense to consider this work moving forward without the support and buy-in of child- and youth-led organizations. Consulting them, engaging them, and collaborating with them is crucial. Their engagement in participatory philanthropy is crucial and hearing from them about why this is important and the impact that it has on their groups and their work is vital in advancing this work.
- **Additional research.** Although a lot has been said about the issue, there are certainly still many pending issues and ideas that can be further explored through research. As more and more funders are implementing different models of participatory grantmaking, for example, it will become crucial to ensure that research is done in the short and long-term to assess their success and impact and to continue gathering evidence and sharing lessons learned.

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