



—THE TAALA FOUNDATION

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SUSTAINABILITY AMIDST
CONTINUOUS ADVERSITY:
FUNDERS GUIDE

AUGUST 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the Civil Society Organizations and individuals whose invaluable insights and experiences have enriched this Funders Guide and informed the creation of our operational manual. While many contributors and organizations have chosen to remain unnamed, their collective input has shaped resources that reflect the complex realities and dynamic challenges faced by communities worldwide.

We would like to specifically acknowledge Daisy Nakato, Editar Ochieng, Arnold Nicholas, James Wandera Ouma, and Mulungi Sanyu for their willingness to be recognized and for their significant contributions to this work.

Special recognition goes to the Taala Foundation team, whose dedication and collaboration were essential in bringing this project to life. We also express our deep gratitude to the Global Fund for Community Foundations for their unwavering support and belief in our mission and vision for an inclusive world.

Finally, we acknowledge the exceptional contribution of Dr. Stellan Bosire, whose generosity in sharing her deep experience of contemplative practice in diverse settings and passionate commitment to social justice have profoundly influenced both this Funders Guide and the operational manual.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is currently facing a complex 'polycrisis,' marked by a convergence of economic, environmental, social, and political challenges. Simultaneously, there is a concerning global trend of diminishing democracy, accompanied by a growing resistance to gender equality and the rights of sexual and gender minority persons. Across Africa, various countries have grappled with challenges to democracy and human rights, often with civil society organizations taking a leading role in advocating for democratic reforms. In this multifaceted national, regional, and global context, it is imperative that preparedness plans prioritise intersectionality, taking into consideration the unique identities and vulnerabilities of sexual and gender minority individuals and communities. Drawing from our study and the experiences of actors across the globe, we aim to shed light on critical issues related to public discourse, legitimacy challenges faced by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), sustainability and resilience, regulatory obstacles, and movement building within the context of sexual and gender minority persons. Through this paper, we endeavor to provide a comprehensive overview of key insights and recommendations, contributing to the ongoing efforts to effectively and inclusively tackle these global challenges.

PART I: FUNDER PRACTICES, PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS.

Unjust Systems of Philanthropy

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

Rethinking the systems of philanthropy is an imperative step towards cultivating sustainability within movements and organisations, allowing them to effectively confront adversity. The historical trajectory of the philanthropic sector, marked by the accumulation of wealth and power through colonialism, enslavement, and extractive practices, coupled with its contemporary perpetuation of white supremacy and systemic inequities, underscores the pressing need for a profound reexamination of its role in fostering meaningful and sustainable change amidst diversity.

It is crucial to acknowledge and understand the deep historical roots of philanthropy's wealth and influence. Many philanthropic institutions have benefited from historical injustices such as colonialism, where resources were extracted from colonised regions, often accompanied by the oppression of indigenous populations. The legacy of wealth amassed through these practices continues to shape the philanthropic landscape. Furthermore, the ongoing perpetuation of white supremacy and systemic inequities within philanthropy is a stark reality. These dynamics influence how resources are allocated and distributed, perpetuating disparities in funding and support for social justice causes. It is essential to recognize that addressing these issues requires more than surface-level changes; it demands a fundamental restructuring of philanthropic practices and principles.

One lens through which we can envision a just transition within philanthropy is by evaluating the roles within the sector. For example, consider the role of a program officer within a philanthropic organisation. This role often parallels that of a loan officer in a bank conducting due diligence before approving a loan. Both positions involve assessing the viability and impact of investments, whether financial or philanthropic. However, the implications of these assessments can be profound, as they determine the allocation of resources and support for critical initiatives. Moreover, philanthropy has, at times, borrowed practices from academic, banking, and corporate sectors, practices that may not align with the goals of social justice and meaningful impact, especially in times of adversity. For instance, the tendency to provide one-year, project-based grants can hinder the long-term sustainability of organisations working towards transformative change. Core support, which is often an essential ingredient for organisational stability and effectiveness, may be overlooked or underappreciated.

In essence, rethinking philanthropy involves dismantling systems of oppression embedded within its historical foundations and contemporary practices. It requires a shift towards more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to resource allocation and support. By critically examining the sector's role, embracing a just transition, and challenging harmful practices, philanthropy has the potential to become a powerful catalyst for transformative change and social justice. This transformation is not only essential for the philanthropic sector itself but also for the broader movements and organisations it seeks to support in their efforts to address adversity and promote sustainable change.

Dysfunctional silos

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

The key findings from stakeholders shed light on the disruptive consequences of philanthropic organisations operating in isolation when responding to the needs of activists, human rights defenders, and organisations grappling with adversity. In essence, when funders operate independently and in isolation from one another, it leads to fragmented efforts in addressing shared goals. Imagine a scenario where multiple philanthropic organisations, each with its own mission and approach, provide support to a single cause or issue. In this scenario, their actions might overlap or duplicate, resulting in a lack of synergy and efficient resource utilisation. This redundancy not only consumes valuable resources but also creates confusion and inefficiencies in the efforts to bring about positive change.

Another significant challenge that stakeholders highlight is the inefficient allocation of resources. When funders work in isolation, they may inadvertently allocate resources to areas where they are not optimally utilised. For instance, multiple funders might unknowingly invest in similar initiatives or projects, leading to an oversaturation of resources in one aspect while neglecting other critical needs. This misallocation can hinder the overall impact of philanthropy and create disparities in the support provided to different areas within a particular cause.

Siloed approaches often limit the collective effectiveness of funders. When organisations operate independently, they miss out on the synergistic benefits that collaboration can offer. Through collaboration, philanthropic entities can pool their resources, knowledge, and expertise, leading to a more comprehensive and impactful response to complex social challenges. By working together, they can leverage their strengths and capabilities to tackle issues more effectively than they could in isolation.



Collaboration provides a fertile ground for continuous learning and adaptation. In the dynamic landscape of social issues, challenges evolve, and strategies must adapt to remain effective. When funders collaborate, they create a space for sharing insights, lessons learned, and best practices. This collaborative learning environment allows them to refine their approaches over time, ensuring that their efforts remain relevant and impactful in the face of changing circumstances.

Risk Avoidance and the Cost to Social Justice

Key Reflections from Stakeholders:

Risk avoidance and its implications for social justice are pivotal issues in contemporary philanthropy. Mainstream philanthropic practices, which often prioritise small and incremental changes, have inadvertently given rise to a substantial challenge: the vulnerability of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Activists, and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in the face of systemic risks. These individuals and organisations are grappling with the pressing need to adapt rapidly and profoundly to confront the escalating pressures that they encounter. However, the prevailing reluctance to take significant risks in philanthropy threatens their resilience over time.

Activists, CSOs, and HRDs find themselves in a perpetual state of crisis, where their dedication to addressing an array of challenges is relentless. These challenges range from long-term crises, such as the erosion of civil society space, the ascendance of authoritarianism, and the proliferation of anti-rights movements, to acute crises like conflicts, the imposition of repressive laws, and the escalating frequency of climate disasters. For these courageous individuals and organisations, crisis has become a daily reality. Despite the adversities they face, they continue their unwavering commitment to advancing the rights and dignity of marginalised communities. Within this dynamic landscape, philanthropy occupies a pivotal role. Philanthropic organisations and funders possess the requisite resources, influence, and capacity to make a substantial impact on addressing these complex and interconnected crises. However, it necessitates a fundamental shift in philanthropic practices—a shift that entails embracing risks that align with the mounting threats posed to democracy, free expression, women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and the overarching climate crisis.

The reluctance to act decisively in philanthropy when faced with escalating challenges poses severe risks. When democracy is under siege, when hard-fought rights are in retreat, and when the climate crisis is wreaking havoc on vulnerable communities, the cautious and conservative stance of philanthropy becomes riskier than ever. The traditional approach of advocating for small, incremental changes no longer suffices in safeguarding the fundamental principles of justice, freedom, and equality that activists, CSOs, and HRDs tirelessly uphold. The implications of risk aversion in philanthropy are profound. It undermines the capacity of these organisations and individuals to respond effectively to the pressing issues of our time. It hinders their ability to adapt to new and emerging challenges, eroding their resilience over time. Moreover, risk aversion perpetuates a cycle of incrementalism that falls short of the transformative change required to address the root causes of systemic injustices.

PART II: SHIFTING THE TIDE

Regenerative philanthropy

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

Regenerative Philanthropy is a visionary approach that seeks to empower communities to take control of their own challenges and enhance their self-reliance and self-determination. This philosophy is grounded in the belief that, given the right resources and skills, communities have the inherent capability to establish organisations and enterprises that cater to their unique needs. In practical terms, regenerative philanthropy focuses on directing philanthropic resources to the development of democratic, community-based enterprises. This approach aims to create sustainable financial institutions deeply rooted in grassroots communities, ensuring that assets are redirected toward local control and productive endeavours. It actively supports economic development initiatives that enable communities to harness their inherent potential. At its essence, regenerative philanthropy strives to democratise concentrated wealth, placing it under the democratic governance of communities. This empowerment enables communities to engage in creative and productive activities, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more compassionate and equitable world. Regenerative philanthropy offers several advantages that can contribute to sustainability amidst diversity and address the multifaceted challenges faced by communities and organisations:

- **Empowerment of Communities:** Regenerative philanthropy prioritises community empowerment by enabling communities to take control of their challenges and develop solutions tailored to their specific needs. This empowerment ensures that communities are actively engaged in the decision-making processes, leading to sustainable solutions that resonate with their values and priorities.
- **Local Ownership and Control:** By fostering community-based enterprises and institutions, regenerative philanthropy promotes local ownership and control of resources. This local control ensures that assets and initiatives remain rooted in the community, reducing dependency on external actors and enhancing sustainability.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Regenerative philanthropy often focuses on building lasting, community-driven solutions rather than short-term interventions. This long-term perspective ensures that the impact endures and adapts to changing circumstances, including diversity in challenges and opportunities.
- **Resilience Building:** Regenerative philanthropy encourages communities to develop resilience by diversifying their sources of income, building local capacities, and responding effectively to challenges. This resilience is crucial for sustainability in the face of diverse and evolving threats.
- **Alignment with Local Values:** Regenerative philanthropy emphasises the importance of respecting and aligning with local cultural values and traditions. This ensures that initiatives are culturally sensitive, leading to greater acceptance and sustainability within diverse communities.

Trust-based philanthropy

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

Trust-based philanthropy represents a holistic approach that encompasses not only grantmaking practices but also influences an institution's culture, structures, and leadership. This approach is particularly significant in times of adversity for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as it focuses on advancing equity, shifting power dynamics, and establishing mutually accountable relationships between funders and grantees. Trust-based philanthropy acknowledges the long-term and unpredictable nature of nonprofit work. Providing multi-year, unrestricted funding allows grantees the flexibility to allocate resources where they are most needed. This approach promotes innovation, emergent actions, and sustainability, empowering CSOs to respond more effectively to adversity without the constraints of rigid project-based grants. Traditionally, nonprofits are burdened with extensive application processes to secure funding. Trust-based philanthropy shifts this burden to grantmakers by requiring them to proactively learn about potential grantees. This saves nonprofits valuable time and resources in the early stages of the funding process and fosters a more respectful and equitable relationship between funders and CSOs. Nonprofits often spend a disproportionate amount of time on administrative tasks driven by funders' requirements. Trust-based philanthropy encourages a more streamlined approach focused on open dialogue and mutual learning. This approach reduces administrative burdens and paves the way for deeper, more productive relationships between funders and CSOs.

Open and transparent communication is the cornerstone of trust-based philanthropy. When funders are open about their decision-making processes, challenges, and vulnerabilities, it establishes a foundation of trust. Responsive communication further strengthens relationships by demonstrating a commitment to addressing the evolving needs and challenges faced by CSOs. Trust-based philanthropy acknowledges that funders do not possess all the answers. Grantees and communities offer invaluable insights that can inform a funder's strategies and approaches. By actively seeking feedback and incorporating it into decision-making processes, funders can enhance the long-term success of their grantmaking initiatives. In times of adversity, CSOs often require more than just financial support. Trust-based philanthropy recognizes the importance of providing responsive, adaptive, and non-monetary support. This assistance can strengthen the leadership, capacity, and overall organisational health of CSOs, particularly those that have historically lacked access to networks and adequate support. In a trust-based philanthropic relationship, program officers play a pivotal role. They strive to become thought partners and collaborators with grantee partners, placing the mission of the organisation above all else. Their goal is to support the success of grantees while also cultivating insights and learnings that can inform the foundation's broader grantmaking strategies. This approach fosters a deeper sense of partnership, trust, and shared commitment to addressing adversity and advancing social justice through collaborative efforts between funders and CSOs. Trust-based philanthropy is a vital tool for philanthropic organisations to navigate challenging times and contribute to building resilient and adaptive CSOs.

Funding Intersectionality

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

Embracing an intersectional perspective in philanthropy involves a deliberate effort to engage with individuals and communities within the complex contexts of their lives. It entails recognizing that our multiple identities and characteristics intersect in ways that can either amplify privilege or exacerbate injustice. Without considering intersectionality, we miss the intricate and interconnected forces that shape inequalities and oppressions. These complexities cannot be adequately addressed by focusing solely on single-issue approaches.

Philanthropy that lacks an intersectional lens tends to reinforce artificial divisions among various human rights issues and movements. This separation hinders a comprehensive understanding of how these issues intersect and overlap. The absence of intersectionality results in the fragmentation of funding. Resources are divided into increasingly smaller portions, making it challenging for organisations to pursue holistic and inclusive approaches. Philanthropy must align with the boldness, creativity, and reality of contemporary social justice organising. Failing to embrace intersectionality means that funders are not effectively supporting the multifaceted nature of these efforts. Many human rights grants are narrowly focused on single issues or specific populations. For instance, funding streams for LGBTQI individuals and persons with disabilities often exist in isolation within human rights philanthropy. Few initiatives systematically address multiple human rights issues together. For example, initiatives that aim to ensure equitable access to healthcare and social security for marginalised communities—such as LGBTQI individuals, children, the elderly, HIV/AIDS patients and families, women heads of households (WHH), survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and sex workers—are rare.

Funders play a pivotal role in rectifying these shortcomings by adopting intersectional approaches to their philanthropic endeavours. This entails recognizing the interconnectedness of human rights issues and acknowledging that individuals and communities experience multiple forms of oppression and privilege simultaneously. Funders should expand their scope to encompass the interplay of various human rights issues and movements. Recognizing that many individuals and communities face intersecting challenges allows for more holistic solutions. It is essential to support marginalised and vulnerable communities comprehensively. This includes allocating resources to address the diverse needs and experiences of LGBTQI individuals, persons with disabilities, WHH, SGBV survivors, and others. Encourage collaboration and cooperation among organisations working on different aspects of human rights. Facilitating partnerships can enhance the collective impact of interventions. Provide funding that is flexible and responsive to the unique challenges faced by intersectional groups. This allows organisations to adapt their strategies to meet evolving needs effectively.



Funding self and communal care

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

Funders and philanthropy play a crucial role in resourcing both individual and collective care for activists, organisations, and human rights defenders who often experience adversity in their tireless pursuit of social change. Funders should prioritise the health, retention, and resilience of their grantees. This investment equips social change organisations with the necessary abilities to effect the positive change we aspire to see. Moreover, it helps attract and retain new talent within the social sector. By recognizing that well-being is an essential ingredient for successful social change, funders can contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of their grantees. Funders can provide multi-year grants to organisations specifically designated for well-being support. These grants allow organisations to tailor well-being initiatives to their unique needs, ensuring that support is available when and how it is most needed. Supporting competitive salaries, retirement benefits, and staff capacity through increased core funding is essential. This not only reduces stress related to personal finances and retirement but also narrows the compensation gap between nonprofit and foundation sectors.

Competitive compensation and capacity-building support enable organisations to attract and retain staff, even in the face of challenging work environments and broader societal issues. Funders should seek to understand the risks that social change work imposes on the workforce. This understanding enables the development of strategies to mitigate those risks effectively. Philanthropic organisations can create space for open and constructive discussions on well-being during convenings and meetings with grantees. This encourages grantees to explore deeply personal well-being issues and signals that their well-being is a high priority for funders. Such discussions foster a culture that prioritises well-being within social change organisations. Providing leadership coaching for staff at all levels of social change organisations is an effective way to promote a culture of well-being. This investment not only models well-being but also strengthens skills that enhance collaboration, trust, and growth within teams.

Accountability

Reflections from Key Stakeholders:

For funders and philanthropists, accountability is crucial, particularly in meeting the demands of activists, Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working under challenging conditions. It is a commitment that goes beyond financial obligations and includes values and behaviours that are essential to upholding integrity, reliability, and openness in the charitable industry. At its core, accountability compels funders and philanthropic organisations to remain unwavering in their dedication to their core mission. This means consistently aligning their actions with the intentions, values, goals, and visions laid out by their benefactors, donors, or corporations.

It emphasises the sacred trust placed upon them to utilise resources for the greater good in ways that resonate with the aspirations of those who have entrusted them. Furthermore, accountability extends beyond national borders and legal frameworks.



It emphasises the sacred trust placed upon them to utilise resources for the greater good in ways that resonate with the aspirations of those who have entrusted them. Furthermore, accountability extends beyond national borders and legal frameworks. It mandates that funders serve the public good in compliance with both national laws and international conventions. This international perspective ensures that philanthropic activities respect the sovereignty and legal requirements of the communities and nations they aim to assist, thereby preventing any undue imposition or interference. Inclusivity is a cornerstone of accountability, necessitating active engagement with stakeholders. These stakeholders may include grant recipients, partner organisations, communities and the general public.

Encouraging active participation and communication serves to demystify the intentions and decision-making processes of funders. It provides a platform for stakeholders to offer their insights, feedback, and perspectives, fostering an environment of openness, collaboration, and shared responsibility. In this manner, funders not only manifest their commitment to inclusivity but also gain invaluable insights that can enhance the effectiveness and relevance of their initiatives. Upholding a robust value system is important for funders and philanthropic organisations when they are supporting movements, organisations, and activists facing adversity. The following core values provide a foundation for ethical and effective engagement:

- ***Integrity:*** This foundational value necessitates that funders engage in international philanthropy consistently with their mission, values, vision, and core competencies. It underscores the importance of maintaining transparency and authenticity throughout all facets of international work, whether it pertains to programmatic, operational, or financial aspects. Being honest and forthright with stakeholders is imperative, as it cultivates trust and credibility in philanthropic efforts.
- ***Understanding:*** A profound understanding of the political, economic, social, cultural, and technological context in which international philanthropy operates is vital. To adhere to this value, funders should invest the time and resources required to conduct thorough research and analysis. They should also tap into existing expertise, including local knowledge, to develop philanthropic strategies that are not only realistic but also contextually appropriate. This value underscores the significance of being well-informed and making decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which they are operating.
- ***Respect:*** Respect is a fundamental value that calls on funders to avoid cultural arrogance when engaging in international philanthropy. It underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating cultural differences and human diversity. Funders should acknowledge and appreciate local knowledge, experiences, and accomplishments, remaining modest about their own knowledge and abilities. When visiting international grantees and partners, this value reminds funders that they are guests in another country and should conduct themselves accordingly.
- ***Responsiveness:*** Responsiveness is a crucial value in ensuring that philanthropic efforts are effective and appropriate. Funders must actively listen to their international grantees and partners, seeking to understand their unique needs and realities. This value encourages flexibility and adaptability, as funders should be open and prepared to adjust their original objectives, timelines, and approaches to align with the local context and capacity. Importantly, funders should refrain from imposing their own models or solutions and instead build relationships of trust with grantees, partners, and the communities they serve.