

An open letter to International NGOs who are looking to ‘localise’ their operations

Our plea is that you work with us not against us. We need to be supported, not competed with.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/an-open-letter-to-international-ngos-who-are-looking-to-localise-their-operations/>

This letter is the product of a protracted, heated, angry and passionate discussion that took place on the #ShiftThePower WhatsApp group last week. Several people on the group had been approached separately by International NGOs who wanted to learn about their experiences in local fundraising and building community philanthropy, but in ways that all felt were ‘extractive.’ These interactions point to the growing trend for INGOs to look further afield for resources to fill the funding gap that many are experiencing.

March 5th 2020

Dear INGOs:

Thank you for taking an interest in our countries. We represent a wide range of national and subnational organisations based in countries – mostly in the global south - where you often work. We have probably even been in meetings together or have been represented in the success stories you give to your supporters.

We appreciate that over the years, many of you have sought to help deliver much-needed services, and have helped to elevate some issues of concern, like debt relief, gender or climate change, to the world stage.

But times are changing. And you have (rightly) been facing a number of critiques in recent years – around your legitimacy, your ‘whiteness’ or the fact that far more aid money ultimately ends up in the pockets of northern organisations’ headquarters than it does in the Global South.

We see that you’re trying to respond to these critiques by ‘localising’, as we’ve been asked to meet with your highly paid consultants on numerous occasions. The strategy is pretty common: usually you start by creating a ‘local organisation’ with a local board. A next step that we’re seeing is that you enter the world of DRM - ‘Domestic Resource Mobilisation’ - to raise money from within our countries. This latter aspect is probably also down to the fact that your traditional incomes from the rich North/West are starting to diminish, so this has the added bonus of replenishing lost incomes.

In theory, this probably sounds great to your northern ears: local middle-income people should indeed ‘own’ their civil society, especially as a response to growing concerns around closing civic space and authoritarian governments. We couldn’t agree with you more on this principle.

But there are things we object to and some suggestions about how you can use your international muscle to help us more effectively than through this misguided localisation agenda.

What happens in practice is that these efforts only serve to reinforce the power dynamic at play, and ultimately to *close* the space for domestic civil society. This can be illustrated quite simply: a multi-million-dollar INGO, with an entire marketing, communications and fundraising team, whose project budget for this endeavour probably outstrips that of most of our national organisations for a year, then comes into the South to raise money ‘domestically’.

Perhaps the board has set a target of raising 30% of total income directly from the South. That’s not an additional million dollars, that’s a million or more dollars taken away from local civil society. And worse still, most of this money will be siphoned off to pay for their own inner workings, rather than be invested on the ground.

All of this serves to weaken us locally. It keeps us in a master/servant relationship continuously begging for grants from your institutions, while we remain bereft of core funding ourselves. This is not what we need or want.

Instead, here’s how you can be more helpful with your ‘DRM’ investment: if you are serious about ‘shifting power’ then reduce your footprint and brand and use your fundraising machinery to help grassroots organisations create the structures to fundraise for themselves and sustain their work.

We need the infrastructure for people to raise money domestically and from diaspora, not to be competing with big global INGOs. What is ultimately needed is to strengthen and scale up southern civil society, not to be pushed out of our own communities and markets.

Do you need to exist in every country with your brand? No. There are often local organisations, like ourselves, who work effectively on the ground, with better connections to the local community. And many of us also have the skills and capacity to represent our issues on the world stage.

We represent an eclectic mixture of organisations, but we are, increasingly, uniting under the banner or hashtag of [#ShiftThePower](#) and its “[Manifesto for Change](#).”

Our plea is that you work with us, not against us. We need to be supported, not competed with, and certainly not replaced.

Sincerely,

1. African Philanthropy Network
2. Arusha Municipal Community Foundation, Tanzania
3. Caring Volunteers Network (CAVNET), Ghana
4. Community Self Reliance Centre, Nepal
5. Dalit Community Foundation, India
6. Development Expertise Center, Ethiopia
7. Development Research and Advocacy, Ghana
8. Emma Crewe, SOAS University of London, UK
9. Equality for Growth, Tanzania
10. Foundation for Civil Society in Tanzania, Tanzania
11. Foundation for Social Transformation, India
12. Fundação Micaia, Mozambique
13. Ghana Philanthropy Forum, Ghana

14. Global Fund for Community Foundations, South Africa
15. Global Peace Association, Ghana
16. Gramin Evam Nagar Vikas Parishad (GENVP), India
17. Greenfield Africa Foundation, Ghana
18. International Foundation for Students and Youth Development (IFSYP), Ghana
19. Keepers Zambia Foundation, Zambia
20. Le Fond our les Femme Francophone, Togo
21. LIN Center for Community Development, Vietnam
22. Mauritius Council for Social Services, Mauritius
23. Multikids Africa, Ghana
24. NZP+ Mufumbwe, Zambia
25. Olive Luena Education Trust, Tanzania
26. Participatory Action for Community Empowerment Foundation (PEACE), Zambia
27. People's Action Forum (PAF), Zambia
28. Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family (FRCCF), Romania
29. Ruth Foundation, Zambia
30. Sahakarmi Samaj, Nepal
31. Sahara Advocates for Change, Ghana
32. SEED Malaysia, Malaysia
33. Selma Foundation, Ghana
34. Tanzania Community Foundation Network, Tanzania
35. Thubutu Africa Initiatives, Uganda
36. UHAI EASHIRI, Kenya
37. West Africa Civil Society Institute, Ghana
38. Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) Mongu, Zambia
39. Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB), Zambia
40. Zambia Council for Social Development, Zambia (ZCSD)
41. Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC), Zambia
42. Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society (ZGF), Zambia
43. Kenya Community Development Foundation, Kenya
44. Greenline Africa, Zimbabwe
45. Masila Ghana Foundation, Ghana
46. ADESO, Kenya
47. Hard Rock Self-Sufficiency Foundation, Nigeria
48. COAST, Bangladesh
49. Green String Network, Kenya
50. Coss Bazaar CSO/NGO Forum, Bangladesh
51. Vision Changers Kenya
52. Help Foundation for Victims of Insurgency in Nigeria
53. Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication
54. Social Life and Agricultural Development Foundation, Somalia
55. East Africa Philanthropy Network
56. Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana
57. Women Aspire Network Ghana
58. Solidarity Foundation, India
59. Yayasan Usaha Mulia (Foundation for Noble Work), Indonesia
60. Assembly of Social Mobilization, Sri Lanka
61. Indonesia for Humanity (Indonesia untuk Kemanusiaan / IKa), Indonesia
62. Professor Emma Crewe, Director, on behalf of Global Research Network on Parliaments and People, UK

63. Dr Meheret Ayenew, Research Fellow FSS and Adjunct Faculty, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
64. Wajir South Development Association, Kenya and Somalia
65. Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD), Somalia
66. Let Them Help Themselves (LTHT)
67. Reproductive Health and Rights Advocacy Initiative (REHEaRD), Nigeria
68. ASDA, Chad
69. Firelight
70. Sense, India
71. Zamzam foundation, Somalia
72. Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum
73. Women for India Foundation
74. Agency for Peace Initiatives and Inclusive Development-APID, Kenya
75. YouthNet Nagaland, India
76. Community World Service Asia
77. Development and Justice Initiative, India
78. Usikimye, Kenya
79. AFroIDEA, Kenya, Uganda, Swaziland and Nigeria
80. UDYAMA, India
81. CORAFID Centre for Innovation and Research
82. Jijenge youth organization, Kisumu, Kenya
83. GISRF (Global Information and Social Resource Foundation)
84. Friends, Bangladesh
85. Rawa Fund, Palestine
86. Activate Labs, Mexico/US
87. Lasphumakhona Community Development Projects (LCDP) South Africa
88. HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, New Delhi, INDIA
89. Free Expression Myanmar (FEM), Myanmar
90. Center for Development Support Initiatives
91. AJSA India
92. Sustainability Leadership Kosova - Kosovo
93. Ngetha Media Association for Peace (NMAP) , Uganda
94. WASDA, Kenya
95. Kaalo, Somalia
96. Horn of Africa Voluntary Youth Committee (HAVOYOCO), Somaliland and Ethiopia
97. Gargaar Relief and Development Organisation, Somalia
98. Taakulo Somali Community, Somalia
99. SSWC (Save Somali Women and Children), Somalia
100. Children and youth Development society India
101. Golden Red Foundation, India
102. Reaching the Unreached Tanzania (RUT), Tanzania
103. African Diaspora Relocation Agency
104. Whole Planet Initiative, Nigeria
105. Personal Initiative for Positive Empowerment (PIPE) Kenya
106. Ashake Foundation, Nigeria
107. Sangama, India
108. LetsStopAIDS, Canada
109. Mars Football Foundation, India
110. Africa Health and Nutrition, Kenya
111. Taakulo Somali Community Somalia/Ethiopia

112. Mona Younis, Human Rights Advocate
113. Child Care Center, Bihar, India
114. Alliance for Holistic and Sustainable Development Communities (AHSDC),
India
115. Community Care for Emergency Response and Rehabilitation, Myanmar
116. Fund for Congolese Women, Democratic Republic of Congo
117. STAR Ghana Foundation, Ghana
118. MILAP, Nepal
119. Pan African Positive Women's Coalition, Zimbabwe
120. FemPlatz, Serbia
121. Majal, Bahrain
122. Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs de l'Environnement pour le Développement durable,
Guinea
123. POSITIVE-GENERATION, Cameroun
124. Advocacy Core Team, Zimbabwe
125. Dalia Association, Palestine
126. Salamander Trust
127. ACPDH/FS-DDH
128. Community Transformation Foundation Network (COTFONE) , Uganda
129. LifeLine ONG, Benin
130. Youth Development and Voice Initiative (YOVI), Ghana
131. Sera Thabiti, Kenya
132. Dalit Women Fight, New Delhi, India
133. Migrant Support Network, Guyana
134. Watershed Organisation Trust, India
135. Nigerian Women Agro Allied Farmers Association
136. JOINT Liga de ONGs em Mocambique
137. Nabadion youth Alliance Southwest state Somalia
138. Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo (ICD), Uruguay
139. A Mile Away (AMA) Zambia
140. Community Foundation for the Western Region of Zimbabwe
141. Orbeliani, Georgia
142. Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile pour le Développement
(RESOCIDE, Burkina Faso)
143. Hope for Young Girls and Boys. Zambia
144. Airavati Organisation (Hlaing Tsp), Myanmar
145. Reformed Open Community Schools if from Zambia
146. Agency for Peace and Development (APD) Kenya

You can still add your name/organization as a signatory to the letter by visiting the website of the [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#) (GFCF), where an updated list is being maintained as from 17th March 2020. Translations of the letter are also available on the GFCF site.”