From Local Roots to Global Reach: Global South Intermediaries Driving Just and Equitable Governance

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Main Takeaways

This study aims to help funders better understand the potential to work with Global South Intermediaries (GSIs) in advancing localization efforts. We are particularly interested in their potential to help achieve just and equitable governance outcomes. We hope that our findings can inform the design of future partnerships and strengthen recognition of GSIs as an important player in the international funding ecosystem.

GSIs have a strategic role to play in today's funding ecosystem

GSIs have a strategic role to play in today's funding ecosystem. GSIs can be a valuable bridge between Global-North-based funders and grassroots actors in the Global South, having the potential to foster locally led solutions and initiatives.

GSIs can be important partners for governance funding

There are intermediaries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America with a track record of supporting just and equitable governance funding at the local level and with strong systems to comply with donor requirements. Funders do not need to rely exclusively on Global-North-based groups to have confidence in the quality of programming.

GSIs are not monolithic and typologies can be helpful

Intermediaries have a variety of models and roots. We have developed a framework of four GSI models to facilitate thinking on how best to engage and potentially find the right partner. However, we recognize that classification can be complex and will continue to evolve, reflecting the often-diverse roles that GSIs perform.

Seven considerations for partnering with GSIs:

CLOSE TIES WITH LOCAL ACTORS AND CONTEXTS

GSIs can provide significant value to funders through their understanding of local contexts, often-deep connections with local actors, and ability to regrant in appropriate ways (often small amounts). Their ability to identify strategic allies and expand coverage beyond urban areas allows them to build strong relationships with local organizations. Global-North-based funders are often not well-placed to navigate local complexities or give very small grants (or other forms of support). GSIs can bridge this gap. Proximity better positions GSIs to implement locally led solutions effectively, enhancing localization efforts in governance programming.

ABILITY TO TAKE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH

GSIs typically work on multiple thematic areas and are able to foster connections that make sense in the local context. This can importantly contribute to good governance programming that tends to be cross-cutting in nature.

TRUST IS CRITICAL

Trust is a fundamental component of advancing just and equitable governance. It is also critical to effective grantmaking. Given close relationships and being embedded closer to local contexts, GSIs can play a role in fostering trust-based practices that shift power dynamics toward local decision-making.

A DELIBERATE APPROACH TO POWER-SHIFTING

GSIs, as both grantees and grantmakers, can reflect on funding values and practices to ensure that trust and accountability are prioritized. Their effectiveness, however, also depends on funder behaviors. When funders adopt flexible, trust-based approaches, these values resonate within GSIs, encouraging similar interactions with local actors. Conversely, rigid controls can reinforce hierarchies that get passed on to subgrantees, replicating problematic dynamics. It is essential for stakeholders to actively engage in practices that foster genuine partnerships and collaborative governance.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Collective action is vital for addressing systemic governance challenges effectively. GSIs can facilitate collaboration among local stakeholders, helping them unite around common objectives and strengthening partnerships that are adaptive and responsive. When done well, this function can ensure that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to more effective and inclusive outcomes, minimizing the potential of duplicative efforts.

MORE INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO RESOURCES

GSIs can facilitate access to both economic and non-economic resources for historically underserved and underfunded communities. GSIs can make underserved communities more visible to donors and counter traditional resource distribution that often favors larger, well-connected organizations, which fosters equity within funding practices.

CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING

Strengthening the capacities of local actors is essential for achieving just and equitable governance. GSIs have proven that they can be effective in equipping local entities with the necessary tools and skills to be sustainable, impactful organizations.

Of course, **GSIs are not a panacea.** They can offer valuable support in achieving localization goals, but are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Nor are they a substitute for direct funding to local actors. Additionally, the complex political landscapes in which GSIs operate can present unique challenges.

Nonetheless, as Global-North-based donors look to find ways to shift more funding to Global South contexts while retaining reassurance on process, targeting of funds, and impact, GSIs should be proactively considered. With support, they can be **valuable partners in reaching localization targets** and in ensuring that local needs are prioritized in grantmaking. This extends to donors in the governance field, where a growing network of GSIs are building a relevant track record that can give confidence for future investment.

01. Why Global South Intermediaries Matter in the Localization Conversation

The **Trust, Accountability and Inclusion Collaborative (TAI)** is a network of funders dedicated to creating a world where power and resources are distributed equitably, communities are informed and empowered, and governments and the corporate sector act with integrity for the benefit of people and the planet.

TAI members have been discussing ways to enhance support for trust, accountability, and inclusion-related programming at the local level, focusing on funding local organizations, networks, activists, and movements through intermediary organizations (hereafter referred to as intermediaries). Against the backdrop of donor commitments to shift more international funding to local level, and to encourage reflections on these topics, TAI organized its **2024 Learning Days** around the theme "Trust, Accountability, and Inclusion for Locally Led Social Transformation." Participants affirmed that GSIs are essential tools for localization efforts within the philanthropic ecosystems.

"Philanthropy has experienced an explosion in collaborative funds and regranting initiatives, which collectively deployed as much as $3B in funds in 2021 globally" as highlighted in a study by Sampriti Ganguli (2024), supported by the Ford Foundation. With GSIs' increasing significance, several questions arise: Why should we focus on GSIs? What value do they add to localization efforts and to just and equitable governance programming? What strategies and mechanisms do they implement? What challenges could arise when partnering with GSIs to enhance localization and governance programming?

This study addresses these questions by examining the landscape of GSIs through a typology that classifies them into four models. It draws on the experiences of six GSIs with established track records in governance-related funding in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America: **ACENTO, Africa No Filter, Fondo Acción Solidaria, ForumCiv Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, Kenya Community Development Foundation**, and the **Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative.**

The insights shared should help all funders better understand the structures, practices, and challenges faced by GSIs in advancing localization efforts to inform future partnerships and enhance recognition of GSIs as an important player in the international funding ecosystem. Given our case study selection and sectoral focus, they should be especially relevant for those funding governance-related programming.

NOTE FOR THE READER:

The analysis presented in this report is based on the generous insights shared by Global South Intermediaries interviewed for this study, covering their histories, practices, strategies, and challenges. The report is further informed by feedback from TAI members, as well as findings from other research on this topic, which are cited throughout.

Our goal was not to be exhaustive, nor do we claim the findings are representative of all intermediaries or that our typology is definitive. Instead, this report provides a starting point to spark discussions among key actors funding and working in governance programming at the local level.

02. Framework of the Study

Rather than offering an exhaustive theoretical analysis, this section aims to offer a clearer understanding of the framework that has guided this study, composed of three elements:

2.1 Just and equitable governance

2.2 Localization

2.3 Intermediary organizations

10. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

2.1 Just & equitable governance

Just and equitable governance* is a reframing of the broad concept of “good governance” to a paradigm centered on fairness, justice, and inclusivity in both processes and outcomes. It emphasizes equitable, accountable, and transparent institutions that promote diverse participation and protect the rights of all, especially historically marginalized and underfunded groups. Key characteristics include inclusivity, transparency, access to justice, sustainability, and social cohesion. This governance model guarantees that individuals, regardless of background or socio-economic status, have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes.

*This concept of just and equitable governance draws upon insights from key policy frameworks, such as the OECD’s 2020 **policy paper** on Inclusive Governance and the **UNDP’s** foundational pillars for governance programming.

Governance, justice, and equity are deeply intertwined with various social, economic, and environmental factors and are critical to achieving development outcomes, including health, education, gender equity, or climate change. Addressing these interconnections holistically, rather than in isolation, allows for comprehensive solutions that tackle the full range of challenges communities face, creating interventions that address multiple intersecting issues simultaneously.

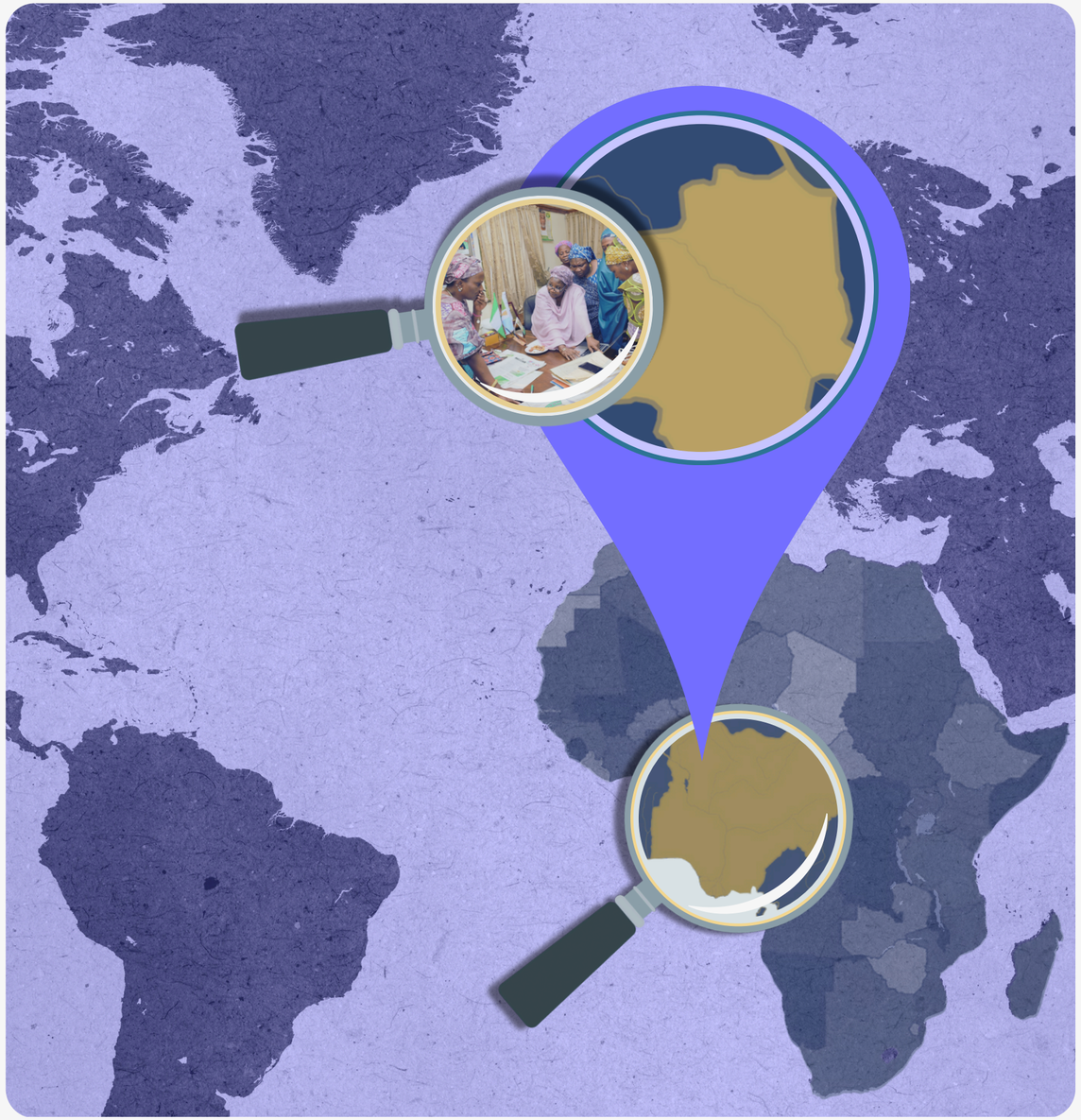
Moreover, just and equitable governance promotes shared responsibility among government, civil society, and the private sector, strengthening social cohesion and fostering collective action for the common good. Localization is essential to these efforts, as it transfers decision-making power and resources to local actors, ensuring that solutions are contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of those most affected.

11. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

2.2 Localization

Localization, while not a new concept, has gained significant momentum in recent years*, especially among donors interested in shifting power dynamics in North-South and donor-grantee relations. This shift channels more resources to frontline groups, movements, and activists, trusting their skills and leadership to craft locally led solutions, tailored to their unique circumstances.

The growing focus on localization sheds light on the reality that Global North donor practices often clash with efforts to boost local leadership and agency in the Global South.



*See Fellow and Paige (2021) as cited in the **OECD study** Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries (2023). Full reference available in the bibliography.

Furthermore, funding patterns still heavily favor Global North organizations. A **recent study** by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), analyzing 60 years of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) practices, found that over 90% of funding directed to the Global South is funneled through DAC-country-based or international civil society organizations (CSOs), leading to limited direct support for local actors. **The study** attributes this imbalance to factors such as risk aversion, mistrust of local organizations, complex administrative requirements, legislative or regulatory barriers, and negative assumptions about local capacities and local actors. These barriers marginalize Global South actors, including intermediaries, limiting their role in governance and development.

*See **Fellow and Paige (2021)** as cited in the OECD study Funding Civil Society in Partner Countries (2023). Full reference available in the bibliography.

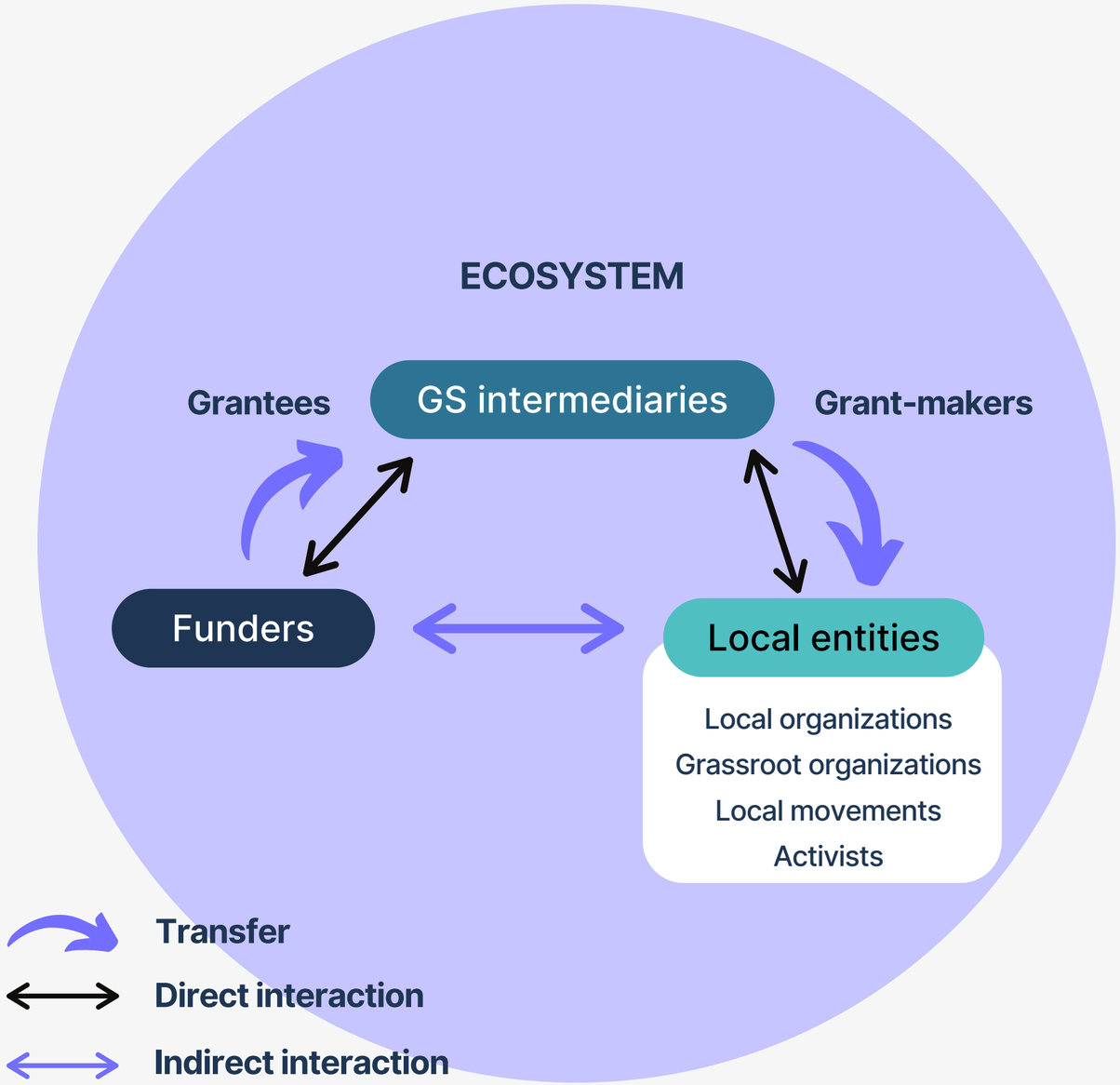
Localization is increasingly seen as critical for addressing these imbalances and driving social change via direct support to frontline groups, movements, and activists*. Initiatives such as the DAC Recommendation on **Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance** and the **Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development**—endorsed by several TAI members—underscore this commitment. **USAID**, for instance, aims to allocate 25% of its funding to locally led organizations by 2025 and ensure 50% of its programs are locally led by 2030. These efforts aim to foster partnerships, strengthen local capacity, and engage communities directly. However, their **latest reporting** points to slow progress—it is hard to shift large donor systems, although philanthropy should, in theory, be more nimble.

Despite the growing relevance of localization as a strategy to increase reach and impact in the Global South, the definition of “local” remains contested. Interpretations vary widely, with debates over whether internationally affiliated organizations count as local, and what geographical scope—subnational, national, or regional—qualifies.

In this study, “local” refers to proximity to specific communities within defined geographic boundaries, acknowledging the diversity of challenges and strategies within the same country.

2.3 Intermediaries

Intermediaries come in many forms, with no single definition or classification capturing their full range. However, a common thread is their role in managing local funding, whether by directly providing grants (often their primary function), performing critical tasks for funders, or advising on grantmaking strategies. Beyond regranting, intermediaries can provide invaluable local expertise, foster networks, build capacities, and promote advocacy efforts, ensuring that funding efforts have a deeper, long-term impact. Studies by **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** (2023), **Ruta Cívica and Oak Foundation** (2024), and **Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation** (2024) support this view. This positions them as crucial players in the philanthropic ecosystem, bridging the gap between funders and recipients while providing expertise to enhance funding impact



Moreover, GSIs occupy a unique position within the funding ecosystem, acting as both grantees and grantmakers. Positioned in the “middle” (See graphic above), they hold a strategic perspective that enables them to connect funders with local partners by navigating the complexities, opportunities, and needs within their ecosystems.

“INTERMEDIARY”: IS THE TERM ADEQUATE?

Many organizations have expressed reservations about the term “intermediary,” viewing it as reductive and insufficiently reflective of the complex roles they play. As noted in **the study** supported by Ruta Cívica and Oak Foundation (2024), in Latin America and the Caribbean, several organizations argue that the term diminishes the agency of Southern organizations, reducing them to mere go-betweens, rather than recognizing their ability to add value and shape agendas. These organizations emphasize that they are not just grant administrators, but active contributors to new perspectives, strategies, and processes. This sentiment was echoed during the **2024 TAI Learning Days**, where participants—including practitioners, intermediaries, and funders—called for terminology that better captures the multifaceted nature of their work.

While we acknowledge these concerns, we recognize that the term has widespread usage and for the purposes of this exercise, rather than replace the term, we encourage recognition of the diversity of roles and functions that these organizations fulfill under the intermediary label. Accordingly, in this study, we continue to use “intermediary” for clarity and consistency with the donor community but distinguish between the various types of organizations through the typology developed in section 3), aiming to reflect the diversity and complexity of their roles.

03. Our Typology: Four Models to Analyze Intermediaries

NOTE FOR THE READER:
This typology was developed in collaboration with Mexican specialist in philanthropy and social change **Liliane Loya**, author of an assessment of funding for civil society organizations and initiatives in Latin America through intermediaries.

Classifying intermediaries is a complex task, as their characteristics and functions overlap. In **the study** by Gibson & Mottola (2023), supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), GSIs include donor-advised funds, community foundations, fiscal sponsors, collaboratives, pooled funds, fund aggregators, and companies providing program design and management services. Moreover, the **Griffith Center for System Innovation** categorizes intermediaries by roles, such as facilitating resource access, enhancing knowledge sharing, or driving advocacy. However, these roles often shift based on ecosystem needs, making function-based classifications complex.

Other models, such as the one proposed by Inside Philanthropy (n.d.) classify intermediaries by structure, grouping them into mission-driven generalists, subject-specific funds, donor advisory services, and community foundations. Meanwhile, the RWJF distinguishes donor-centered intermediaries, focused on meeting donor needs, from those centered on movement-building or providing administrative services to groups, allowing them to focus on their core missions. This typological diversity highlights the wide-ranging impact and adaptability of intermediaries.

To capture the full scope of GSIs—including their structures, strategies, and mechanisms for localization and just and equitable governance programming—we developed a new framework. This framework is built around key differentiating characteristics:

1

Origin

Who created the intermediary organization and how?

2

Primary objetive

Since its creation, was the intermediary's primary role regrating activities?

3

Geographical scope

Which is the geographic area and level in which the intermediary operates?

4

Decision-making

Where does accountability lie? Who oversees decision-making?

Based on these criteria, we identified four models of GSIs. The characteristics depicted in these models reflect "ideal" qualities, focusing on the "should be" rather than the "as is." While these models are referential and may not encompass every intermediary, they serve as a starting point for analyzing these organizations and their structures. An organization may be classified under a particular model based on its dominant characteristics, even if it doesn't meet all the criteria described in that model.

MODEL 1:

Organizations created by civil society actors belonging to local movements with regranting as their top priority.

These entities are registered nonprofit organizations constituted under national laws. They primarily aim at mobilizing resources from national and international donors to support local actors pursuing specific goals. Homegrown and led by individuals who have been part of the same local or national movements, these organizations have deep knowledge of local realities and groups. The decision-making power lies with these individuals, who are closely connected to the grassroots.

Most organizations in this model provide funding to grassroots groups and, at times, to individuals. Besides grants, they often offer capacity-strengthening and network development support. Their geographical scope ranges from country-specific to regional. For instance, in Latin America, environmental and women's groups have a tendency to establish local, national, and regional organizations to bridge gaps between local movements and Global-North-rooted funders.

MODEL 2:

Local organizations that advance a specific goal through advocacy, community organizing, research, or litigation. Their primary objective is not regranting, but they have become involved in this activity to support other actors in their movements/fields.

These mission-driven nonprofit organizations primarily implement initiatives within specific areas or fields. As advocates in their sectors, they have built the trust, credibility, and capacity to bridge institutional donors and civil society actors. While their primary focus isn't resource reallocation, channeling funds to others within their movements has become a complementary strategy to support them to advance their goals. Their deep understanding of field dynamics and local contexts allows them to effectively identify and support a wide range of grantees. These grantees often include community-based groups and grassroots organizations, as well as other nonprofits whose work aligns with their mission.

MODEL 3:

A locally registered organization whose primary goal is regranting, created through the support of a single donor.

These nonprofit organizations, formally registered according to national laws, were established by institutional donors to channel resources to actors within specific regions and fields, often as a strategy upon donor exit from a country or sector. Staffed and directed by local individuals with civil society experience, they bring critical local knowledge to their roles. The organizations may operate on either a country-specific or regional scale and support local actors through grants, capacity-strengthening, and network development.

While governance bodies are primarily local, decision-making power can be shared with the founding institutional donors, who influence the organization's mission and provide broad parameters for spending. However, decisions on specific grantees and grant amounts are made by the organization's local leadership. These organizations often diversify funding sources over time to ensure sustainability beyond initial support.

MODEL 4:

Pooled funds* from two or more institutional donors, and regranting is done by a local or regional entity.

The "pooled funds" model encompasses various approaches where two or more donors contribute resources that are then regranted by a local or regional entity that already exists or is created for this specific purpose. This collaborative approach allows donors with a shared vision to support civil society actors working within a specific thematic area, leveraging their combined resources for greater impact. In some cases, the initiatives established for a specific purpose operate for a limited period; in other cases, they establish fundraising strategies for their future sustainability.

*For further insights into pooled funds, refer to **the study** by Ganguli, S. (2024), supported by the Ford Foundation.

04. Global South Intermediaries Working in Just and Equitable Governance: A Sample

This section presents key insights from a sampling of GSIs promoting just and equitable governance in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, followed by a detailed analysis of six selected organizations.

4.1 Review of Global South Intermediaries Across Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America

Following the discussion on localization, we conducted a desk review (see **Annex 1**) to map GSIs in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America working on just and equitable governance programming and related cross-cutting themes. We excluded intermediaries where regranting decisions are controlled by Global North actors, typically international organizations with centralized headquarters, but that operate through local offices. By focusing on GSIs with local decision-making power, we aimed to highlight actors that foster local leadership and possess deep, context-specific knowledge.

The review revealed that few GSIs are dedicated solely to governance initiatives. However, many work in intersecting areas such as gender, social justice, education, human rights, land rights, and climate change, aligning with our framework of just and equitable governance. These organizations, often founded and staffed by local activists, operate at community, national, or regional levels and have relevant experience to support governance-related programming.

The review confirmed that there are GSIs working on governance-related issues at the local level, which are supporting grassroots organizations, social movements, and civil society groups. Their assistance extends beyond financial aid, to include capacity-strengthening, networking, peer learning, and advocacy. Funding for these initiatives largely comes from philanthropic organizations, with prominent donors including the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Comic Relief, Hewlett Foundation, Luminate, and the European Union. Region-specific donors include the Oak Foundation and Avina Foundation in Latin America and Mama Cash and Comic Relief in Africa.

21. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

The review also indicated trends among donors focused on specific areas. Climate initiatives are typically supported by Open Society Foundations, C.S. Mott Foundation, and Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA). Key donors for women's funds across both regions include the Global Fund for Women, Prospera, Ford Foundation, and Open Society Foundations, with additional backing from Fenomenal Funds, Equality Funds, and Novo Foundation in Latin America.

While our review is unique in its focus on just and equitable governance, it draws from existing studies, including TAI's analysis of **socio-environmental funds** in South America, **assessment** of funding for civil society organizations and initiatives in Latin America through nonprofit funds by Hispanics in Philanthropy, the **mapping** of independent grantmaking organizations for civil society in the areas of socio-environmental justice and community development in Brazil developed by Rede Comuá, or the Bridgespan's philanthropic collaborations **database**.

22. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

4.2 Selected Case Studies: Illustrating GSI Models

Six case studies were selected based on the models outlined in Section 3 and the review of GSIs across Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The criteria for selecting these organizations included:

LOCATION
GSIs operating at the local level in regions prioritized by TAI members

EXPERTISE
Proven track record in just and equitable governance and related fields

DECISION-MAKING POWER
Local control over regranting and strengthening local actors

GRANTMAKING FOCUS
Grantmaking as a core or primary programmatic activity

MODEL REPRESENTATION
Alignment with one of the four models in our typology

23. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

These case studies serve two main purposes. First, they provide insights into the structures, strategies, and characteristics of GSIs, highlighting their role in advancing localization efforts, including those in just and equitable governance programming. Second, they illustrate the various models presented in Section 3.

Note that these six are by no means the only GSIs with relevant experience in governance initiatives. Trust Africa, for example, is a Pan-African foundation and regranter headquartered in Senegal, with extensive programming on governance-related topics and that has been supported by TAI members. The six selected GSIs, while perhaps less well known to many, provide a useful illustration of the variety of potential intermediary partners that could be channels of investment.

In the following pages, we present the six organizations. Extended case study documents for each of them are accessible via the links at the bottom of each page.

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ACENTO, Acción Local

A locally registered organization whose primary goal is regranting, created through the support of a single donor.

25. GSIs working on just and equitable governance

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Mexico. It operates in 25 of the 32 Mexican States.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

Acento was founded in 2020 as part of the MacArthur Foundation's departure strategy in Mexico, with a $10 million fund allocated over five years.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

They support local organizations and networks dedicated to social justice and human rights advancement that have faced significant barriers to funding access. They support 69 grantee partners.

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

ACENTO strengthens local organizations in Mexico committed to social justice and human rights. Equity and inclusion are the main values connecting the organization's actions. ACENTO fosters leadership among historically underfunded groups, particularly women and indigenous communities. They also advocate for transparency in local governance, ensuring that resources and information are accessible to support community empowerment and good governance.

Check the **case study** for more information about **ACENTO**

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Africa No Filter

Pooled funds from two or more institutional donors and regranting is done by a local or regional entity.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Continental, aiming at the 54 African countries.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

ANF is a donor collaborative founded in 2020 by Ford Foundation, Bloomberg, Mellon Foundation, Luminate, Open Society Foundations, Comic Relief, the Conrad Hilton Foundation, and Hewlett Foundation. As a donor collaborative, ANF operates under unrestricted funding.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

Since 2020, they have provided funding to over 270 grantees. Grants are directed to arts and culture, media, content creation, and advocacy projects. Grantees must be part of the African Narrative Collective.

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

ANF works to showcase Africa's diversity and agency, challenging negative narratives centered on poverty and conflict. By promoting new stories and engaging in discussions on race, gender, and equity, ANF reshapes perceptions both externally and internally. Although ANF's role in governance is indirect, their advocacy for an enabling civic space and better representation fosters social cohesion and civic engagement across Africa.

Check the **case study** for more information about **Africa No Filter**

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Fondo Acción Solidaria (FASOL)

Organizations created by civil society actors belonging to local movements with regranting as their top priority.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Mexico. FASOL works in 21 of the 32 Mexican states.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

It was established in Mexico in 2007, through the Global Greengrants Fund's support.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

They support, accompany, and empower grassroots groups, communities, and collectives in Mexico that are striving for socio-environmental justice, with a strong emphasis on gender equality and an intersectional approach.

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

FASOL supports grassroots groups in Mexico advocating for socio-environmental justice with a strong emphasis on gender equality. Their Community Philanthropy model seeks to shift power dynamics within philanthropy by strengthening communities' and collectives' agency in decision-making processes. FASOL's intersectional approach recognizes the diverse challenges in social struggles, enhancing agency and rights protection for marginalized groups.

Check the **case study** for more information about **FASOL**

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ForumCiv, Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa

A locally registered organization whose primary goal is regranting, created through the support of a single donor.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Eastern and Southern Africa.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

The Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office was established in 2017 by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) as part of their localization efforts in the region.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

They support 33 organizations in Kenya and five in Tanzania, ranging from individual change-makers to large organizations with the capacity to regrant.

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

ForumCiv aims to strengthen Eastern and Southern Africa by working on human rights and democracy, gender equality and equity, environment and climate change, and migration and development. Their advocacy-driven approach influences inclusive policy-making at local, national, and subnational levels. Through the Right(s) Way Forward framework, ForumCiv integrates community perspectives, ensuring accountability, transparency, and sustainable resource management in governance.

Check the **case study** for more information about **ForumCiv**

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Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF)

Organizations created by civil society actors belonging to local movements with regranting as their top priority.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Kenya.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

The organization was founded in 1995 by Kenyan experts challenging top-down development approaches and reliance on foreign aid. The Aga Khan Foundation and Ford Foundation provided early support and funding.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

They have supported over 2,000 grantee partners working on education, livelihood improvement, environmental conservation, and civic engagement. The current funding portfolio integrates over 40 partners.

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

KCDF supports sustainable community development by enhancing community voices to address inequality and protect human rights. Their initiatives improve access to education, combat gender-based violence, and enhance livelihoods and environmental management, all while promoting social justice. Ultimately, their work aims to return agency to communities, for them to hold governments accountable.

Check the **case study** for more information about **KCDF**

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Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

Local organizations that advance a specific goal through advocacy, community organizing, research, or litigation. Their primary objective is not regranting, but they have become involved in this activity to support other actors in their movements/fields.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Nigeria, particularly the Federal Capital Territory, Adamawa, Anambra, Enugu, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Kwara, Katsina, Kebbi, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, and Zamfara states.

HOW DID THE ORGANIZATION START?

It was founded in 1999 by the former First Lady, Honorable Justice Fati Lami Abubakar, as an independent NGO. Initial funding was provided by the MacArthur Foundation and the Open Society Foundation.

WHO DO THEY SUPPORT?

To date, WRAPA has supported 25 grantee partners, including civil society organizations, women's rights organizations, faith-based organizations, autonomous social groups, youth, and disability groups, particularly those confronting intersecting forms of discrimination

HOW DO THEY DESCRIBE THEIR WORK IN JUST AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE?

WRAPA facilitates women's access to legal rights and advocates for social justice in Nigeria. By strengthening women's capacity to assert their rights, WRAPA promotes accountability at family and community levels. Their Legal and Social Empowerment Program ensures women can access justice, while advocacy efforts and sensitization campaigns work towards gender equality, enabling women to exercise their rights fully.

Check the **case study** for more information about **WRAPA**

This section has provided key insights from a review of GSIs experienced on just and equitable governance programming in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The selected case studies illustrate the diverse GSI models in our framework, highlighting their structures, strategies, and unique approaches to supporting local governance. In Section 5, we will delve deeper into these case studies, analyzing how their structures and strategies contribute to the advancement of just and equitable governance within their areas of focus.

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05. How are Global South Intermediaries Advancing Just and Equitable Governance? Key Insights

An **ecosystem*** is a network of relationships, structures, and processes within a specific field and among various stakeholders. It also reflects power dynamics, cultural norms, policies, and historical legacies that shape how these stakeholders interact and operate.

GSIs have substantial potential to advance just and equitable governance at the local level by shifting power toward local actors and bridging funding and access gaps for historically underfunded communities. Achieving such governance—and addressing related challenges—requires transformation within the funding and governance ecosystems. The current paradigm is marked by resources transfer from the Global North towards the Global South, which often reflects power imbalances rooted in colonial legacies and a "white savior" mentality. This dynamic undermines local knowledge and capacity, portraying those outside the Global North as lacking the agency to drive their own transformation. Studies like **Time to Decolonise Aid*** by Peace Direct (2023) reveal how funding practices reinforce misconceptions, allowing Global North actors to retain gatekeeping roles and centralize decision-making power.

*Ecosystem's definition, displayed in the box, is inspired by the work of Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). **The water of systems changes.**

See the article by Peace Direct (2021), **Time to decolonise aid: insights and lessons from a global consultation. Full reference available in the bibliography.

NOTE FOR THE READER:
The intermediaries we interviewed generously shared their practices and motivations, providing consistent recommendations for their Global North donor partners. While not the study's primary focus, we summarize these actionable suggestions, which reflect the intermediaries' experiences and align with ongoing critiques of donor practices. These recommendations will be displayed in boxes throughout this section.

For further insights, see the **CAF report on grantmaking (2023)** or the **OECD report on funding civil society in partner countries (2023)**.

GSIs recommend that funders adopt an ecosystem perspective when addressing challenges. Understanding that governance issues intersect with climate, gender, education, and health—and require systemic approaches involving diverse stakeholders—enables funders to allocate support more effectively.

The dual role GSIs perform, acting at the same time as grantees and grantmakers, can equip them with essential tools to bridge gaps between funders and local actors. According to **Gibson & Mottola** (2023), GSIs can address challenges at multiple levels: administratively, they can simplify compliance with local legal and regulatory frameworks, a major hurdle for funders operating across regions. Programmatically, GSIs' deep understanding of local contexts can enable them to monitor, evaluate, and ensure the responsible use of funds, often leading to more sustainable outcomes. Relationally, they can help balance power dynamics between large funders and grassroots organizations, fostering trust-based relationships and navigating cultural nuances. This proximity allows GSIs to implement locally led solutions more effectively, ensuring interventions align with community needs and priorities.

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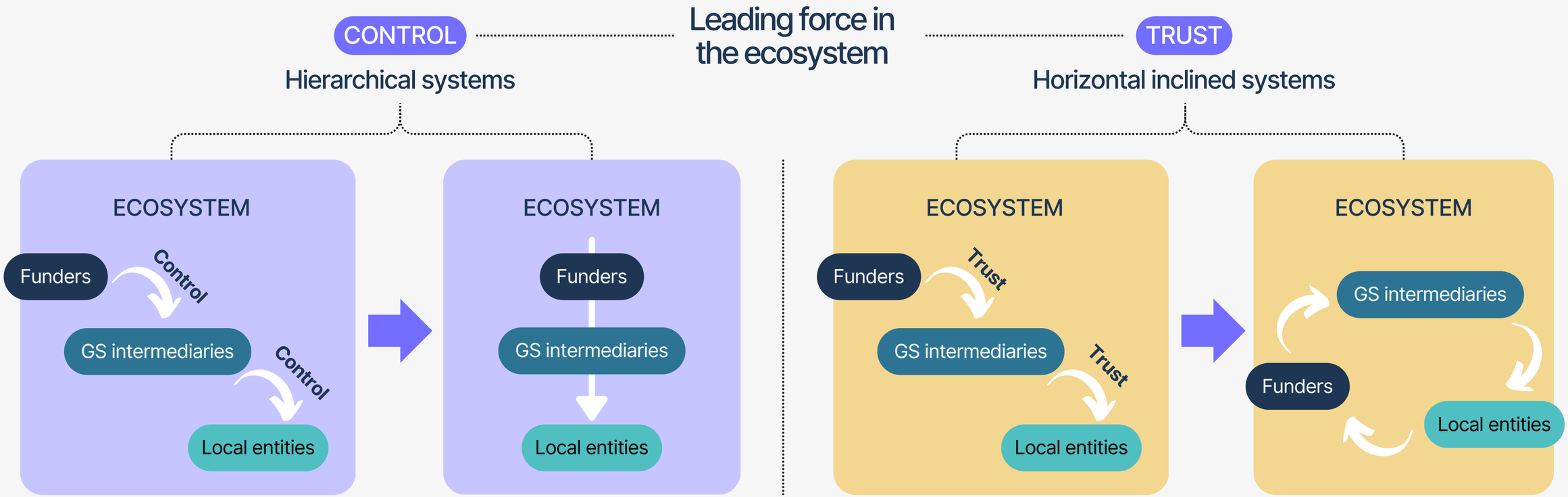
Moreover, GSIs have significant potential to reshape current dynamics by fostering local agency and building a trust-based ecosystem, both of which are essential for social cohesion—a vital component of effective governance. Power-shifting and trust-based practices amplify the role of Global South entities in decision-making, enabling local communities, organizations, and networks to assume greater control. Furthermore, governance systems thrive in environments where an engaged social fabric encourages collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and equitable decision-making in both strategies and actions.

Agency refers to the capacity of different groups to act independently, make decisions, set priorities, and choose strategies that best influence their environment and achieve their goals

By cultivating relationships founded on trust, transparency, and accountability, GSIs can play a pivotal role in creating spaces where local actors can interact, learn, and address systemic challenges together. These interactions contribute to a more inclusive and resilient ecosystem, where equitable relationships among stakeholders improve governance outcomes.

The funding chain and the cascading effect

Before exploring specific strategies and practices that GSIs implement to support governance efforts, it is important to examine the “funding chain.” Many GSI practices and values are rooted in the dynamics of this chain, as the behavior GSIs experience as grant recipients often influences their approach as grantmakers. This tendency for intermediaries to mirror funder values and practices toward local actors is what we refer to as the “cascading effect” (See Graphic Below).



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If funders do not encourage trust and power-sharing, GSIs are unlikely to pass these values on to local organizations. The Center for Effective Philanthropy's **latest study**, Bridging the Gap: Grantee Perspectives on Intermediary Funders (2024), indicates that constraints imposed by GSIs—such as grant size, duration, flexibility, and decision-making—are often influenced by the nature and duration of their funders' commitments. Strict funding and reporting requirements tend to create rigidity, which GSIs may then impose on local actors. When funders and intermediaries lack trust and accountability, GSIs can sometimes act as what TAI Learning Day participant termed as "local administrators of violence."*

Conversely, the cascading effect can also be positive. When funders promote trust and flexibility, GSIs are more likely to adopt these values, fostering greater agency and collaborative partnerships with local organizations. By operating as horizontal partners rather than dominant players, GSIs can cultivate relationships based on mutual respect, positioning local organizations as strategic allies rather than mere recipients.

GSIs suggest that funders promote and prioritize trust-based grantmaking. This approach fosters more equitable partnerships by shifting the focus from control to collaboration, enhancing relationships with grantees and allowing for more flexible and responsive funding strategies that benefit all stakeholders involved.

*A representative from civil society shared this reflection during the TAI Learning Days.

The cascading effect illustrates that long-term ecosystem change requires funders to shift from gatekeepers to gate openers, promoting trust, agency, and shared power. This interconnectedness highlights that power-shifting in funding practices requires funders to reflect on the values they promote through their practices.

In the following sections, we examine the strategies and practices GSIs use to support localization and just and equitable governance programming. We will discuss their efforts in promoting shared decision-making and co-creation (5.1), addressing funding gaps to create opportunities for historically underfunded and excluded communities (5.2), strengthening organizational capacities (5.3), fostering collaboration and networking (5.4), and ensuring financial sustainability (5.5).

This analysis primarily draws from the experiences of the six GSIs highlighted in Section 4, whose representatives generously shared insights on organizational structures, practices, lessons learned, and challenges. Additionally, it incorporates learnings from TAI Learning Days and relevant literature (see Annex 2) regarding intermediaries and GSIs. While focused on these six organizations, we believe these findings reflect broader trends among GSIs. However, we also recognize that the absence of interviews with local organizations, networks, and activists funded by GSIs is a key limitation.

We recognize that an organization operating locally within a specific geography does not automatically imply close proximity to local actors, a commitment to shifting power to the community, or a willingness to strengthen local ecosystems. However, we acknowledge that some organizations do possess and act upon this potential—a quality that characterizes the Global South Intermediaries (GSIs) analyzed in this study.

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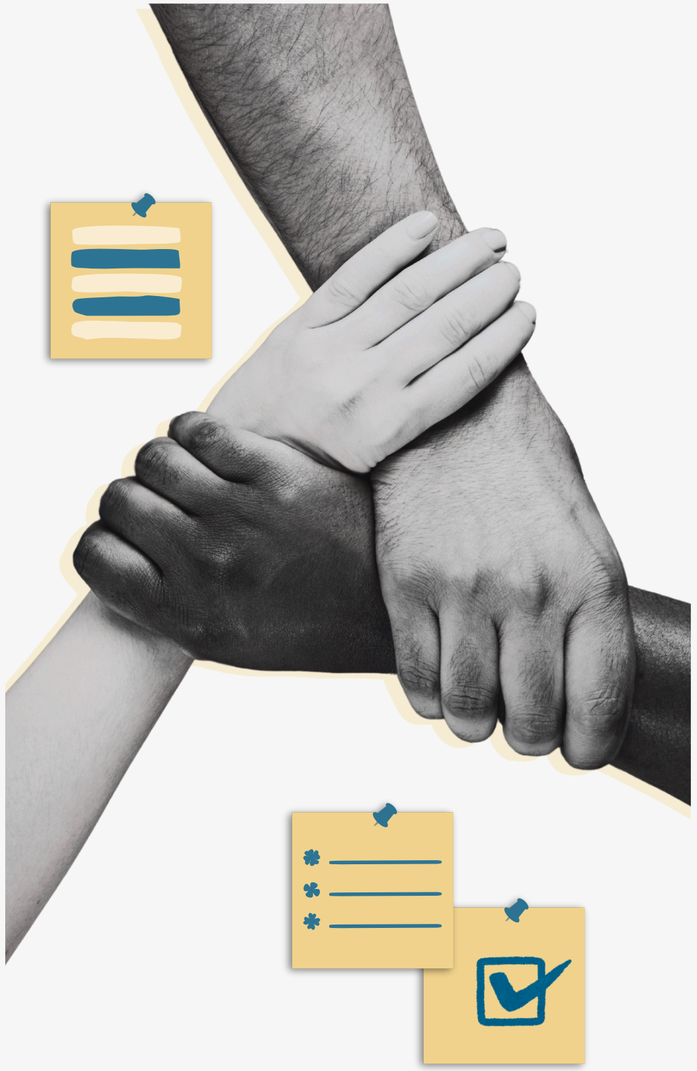

5.1 Shared Decision-making

Shared decision-making is vital for shifting power dynamics, fostering trust, and strengthening community agency. By engaging stakeholders in decision-making, they actively shape priorities and strategies. This collaborative approach challenges existing power structures, promotes shared ownership, and ensures that local insights guide agendas.

Co-creation serves as a key mechanism for enhancing shared decision-making. By decentralizing power and promoting horizontality, it redistributes influence and disrupts top-down structures. This process encourages collaboration among stakeholders who jointly design and implement solutions, integrating diverse perspectives and expertise. Incorporating these varied viewpoints leads to more equitable decisions and fosters a collective commitment to common goals. Stakeholders become actively involved in project planning, strategies' implementation, and resource allocation, ensuring decisions reflect local knowledge and priorities.

Together, co-creation and shared decision-making are essential for building equitable, trust-based partnerships that engage stakeholders meaningfully at all levels. Ultimately, a collaborative governance model, where diverse stakeholders participate in shaping decisions, promotes transparency, inclusion, and social cohesion, thereby strengthening governance structures.

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Because of the characteristics described above, shared decision-making and co-creation strategies and mechanisms are valuable for GSIs, as they align with the core objectives of fostering local agency and inclusive governance. Trust is strengthened as all parties see their input valued, creating an equitable dynamic that challenges traditional power imbalances among funders, intermediaries, and local stakeholders.

GSIs suggest that funders recognize and address power dynamics in resource allocation. Funders should embrace community-driven models, locally led solutions, and shared decision-making, creating the necessary mechanisms so local actors are actively involved.

GSIs suggest that funders ensure flexibility in funding approaches. Allowing organizations to adjust strategies based on new insights or urgent needs arising from shifting political, social, or environmental conditions enhances their ability to respond effectively to complex challenges and optimizes resource use. This flexibility is intrinsically linked to trust in local agency and decision-making.

APPROACHES TO DECISION MAKING ACROSS OUR FOUR MODELS.

Although participatory approaches are fundamental to GSIs' logic, their implementation is inconsistent. The extent to which these mechanisms are utilized often reflects broader power dynamics within the ecosystem, serving as an indicator of how inclusive or hierarchical the ecosystem is.

A revision of the models—detailed in Section 3—reveals that no single scheme distinctly advantages or disadvantages the promotion of shared decision-making. Instead, the flexibility granted by funders, particularly regarding tolerance for trial and error, significantly influences the success of these strategies. GSIs with greater funding flexibility are better positioned to experiment with innovative participatory mechanisms, reducing the perceived risk of co-creation. Conversely, GSIs for which sustainability is less of a day-to-day concern—such as those in models 3 and 4, which receive more stable or pooled funding—can engage in participatory processes without the pressures of funding cycles, allowing for innovation and calculated risk-taking.

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HOW ARE GSIS PROMOTING SHARED DECISION-MAKING AND CO-CREATION?

When funders integrate shared decision-making and co-creation along the funding chain, they have established mechanisms that meaningfully incorporate GSIs' input into funding strategies and processes. Therefore, as grantees, GSIs gain the ability to shape priorities and interventions, thus exercising greater agency. As grantmakers, they can create the mechanisms so this ability is transferred to local actors. The interviewed GSIs implement shared decision-making strategies and co-creation mechanisms in various ways to address power imbalances and strengthen governance. Here are some examples:

FASOL's regranting committee consists of four mentors, six members from its operations team, and two external advisors. The mentors are part of a voluntary network working closely at the community and grassroots levels, bringing local insights and connections into funding distribution decisions.

Through **KCDF's** Community Endowment Funds, communities gain access to and control over financial resources, reinforcing community ownership and positioning them as primary decision-makers in setting priorities and allocating resources to address their identified challenges.

ForumCiv's Right(s) Way Forward approach promotes a co-creation model, where communities and grassroots organizations play a central role in identifying challenges and desired outcomes, which are documented in a Community Action Plan. Decisions on how to address these challenges are made by the communities themselves.

For shared decision-making and co-creation to be truly transformative, they must prioritize the inclusion of underserved communities often excluded from traditional funding processes. We will further explore this in section 5.2.

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5.2 Reaching Underserved and Underfunded Communities

Many organizations and networks operating at the local level are connected with historically underfunded groups that have been excluded from decision-making processes and whose agency has been diminished by longstanding practices and institutions. This exclusion undermines equity and justice, shaping governance frameworks that favor and concentrate power in a few stakeholders. By enhancing the agency of local actors, particularly those that have been historically underfunded and excluded form decision-making, trust-based practices act as an equalizing mechanism, shifting away from this dynamic.

GSIs can play a crucial role in bridging this gap by facilitating access to economic and non-economic resources and creating spaces for interaction, collaboration, and influence. Moreover, GSIs can help make historically underfunded and marginalized communities more visible to donors and other stakeholders, countering traditional resource distribution that often favors larger, well-connected organizations. This approach contributes to rebalancing power dynamics.

GSIs suggest that funders prioritize fair compensation for individuals within organizations. People drive change and supporting them holistically helps shift funding practices away from transactional approaches. Especially at the grassroots level, personal struggles often intersect with organizational challenges, making it vital for funders to consider these realities when determining regranting conditions. By valuing the expertise and efforts of individuals within organizations, funders can support more inclusive and sustainable development.

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APPROACHES TO INCLUSIVITY ACROSS OUR FOUR MODELS.

While each model employs different approaches, the commitment to serving underfunded communities remains a core focus across GSIs. GSIs operating under models 1 and 2 may have an advantage due to their deep-rooted connections within local ecosystems. Organizations under these models often possess existing relationships and a nuanced understanding of the specific challenges faced by underfunded communities. Furthermore, GSIs under models 3 and 4 tend to leverage ongoing interactions at the local level to reach underfunded communities. Under all models, a priority is to connect with grassroots organizations, including those lacking formal legal status, which are often excluded by larger funding bodies.

HOW ARE GSIS REACHING HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITIES?

The interviewed GSIs implement diverse strategies to close the funding gaps for historically underserved and underfunded communities. In the funding chain, open calls are a common strategy to identify potential grantees. However, these often exclude smaller grassroots organizations that lack the internal structures or the legal status to apply. To address this, some GSIs are adopting targeted approaches and mapping exercises to reach recipients traditionally left out. They focus on populations in urban peripheries, rural areas, and regions often overlooked by funders.

ACENTO, for example, has shifted from broad open calls to targeted mapping strategies aimed at reaching underserved populations in Mexico. They prioritize organizations outside Mexico City to rectify geographical disparities in resource allocation. As a result, for example, they are supporting groups advocating for Afro-Mexican rights.

WRAPA leverages its networks and mapping exercises to ensure that support is directed effectively to grantee partners that align with its mission of advancing women's rights. This targeted approach ensures funding reaches organizations and networks along all Nigeria.

Additionally, GSIs create different funding categories to regrant to individual activists, small grassroots organizations, and emerging networks. A tiered funding system is commonly used, allowing more flexibility for grassroots actors:

FORUMCIV.

ForumCiv's tiers range from Tier I for established organizations to Tier IV for grassroots initiatives, scaling support based on each organization's development and growth.

FASOL
Fondo Acción Solidaria, A.C.

FASOL operates a three-tiered funding system. The first tier supports activists working directly with communities, the second strengthens organizations, and the third enhances organizational capacity and reach.

ACENTO
acción local

ACENTO's tiered approach allocates 50% of its funding to small organizations that have never received funding or have annual budgets below USD 13,000, directing resources to underfunded groups.

Addressing resource access gaps is essential for fostering equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities. Funding historically underfunded and excluded groups shifts power dynamics and enhances local agency, thereby strengthening the governance ecosystem. By also offering capacity-strengthening initiatives for these groups, GSIs can enhance their agency to participate fully in decision-making processes. We explore this further in Section 5.3.

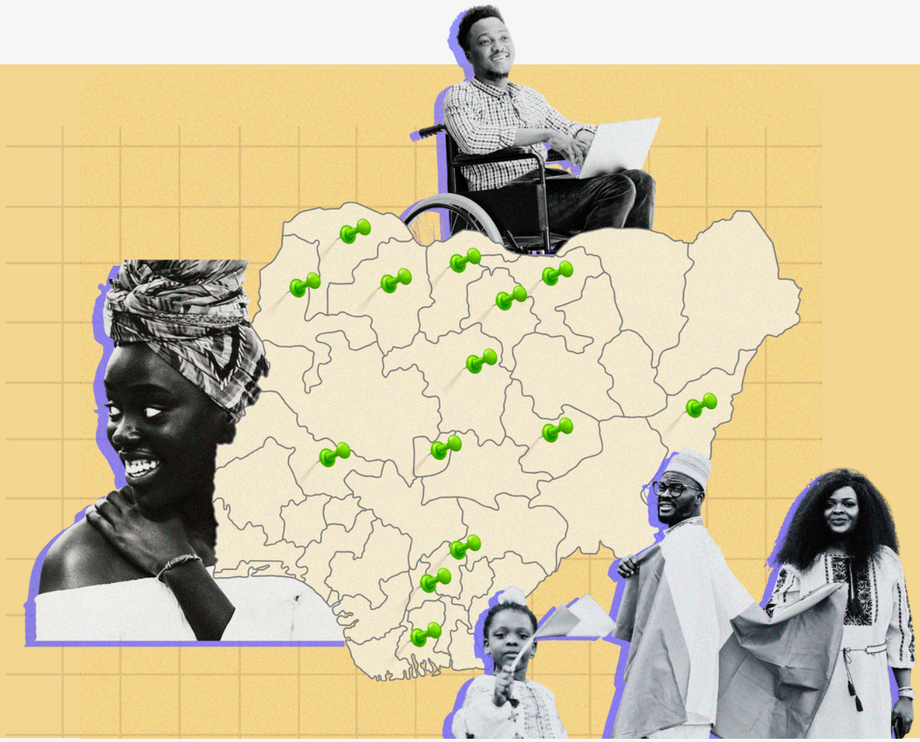
45. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

5.3 Capacity-strengthening

Capacity-strengthening is essential for advancing just and equitable governance efforts, as it equips local actors with the tools needed to sustain change over time and determine their own strategies for effective governance. These processes are vital for sustainable change within ecosystems, directly influencing the structures that enable local partners to exercise agency. Unlike the traditional “capacity-building” paradigm, which often implies that Global North actors possess superior knowledge while Global South capacities are inadequate, a trust-based approach acknowledges that local organizations already have the means to address their challenges. By enhancing capacities through collaboration, stakeholders can foster mutually beneficial exchanges.

Strengthening organizational structures enables local actors to thrive, enhancing self-reliance among Global South actors and reducing dependence on external support. Learning plays a crucial role in this context, offering insights for necessary improvements and fostering continuous enhancement through iterative processes of trial, error, and success. By prioritizing learning, organizations can identify gaps, build on successes, and view failures as opportunities for growth.

Learning-driven strategies ensure that interventions remain relevant and effective in evolving contexts, promoting inclusivity and collaboration aligned with broader sustainability goals. This creates a resilient ecosystem where local actors can reduce inequality and foster well-being while adapting and innovating their initiatives. Ultimately, investing in capacity-strengthening not only provides immediate tools for success but also lays the foundation for long-term impact, driving meaningful change from within.



GSIs suggest that funders shift their emphasis toward learning processes. This focus encourages growth and systemic transformation. Reporting should prioritize lessons learned, adaptations, and broader social impact over rigid financial accountability, enabling organizations to concentrate on sustainable outcomes and long-term change.

GSIs recommend that funders direct resources toward strengthening institutional capacities, prioritizing the development of resilient ecosystems over project-based investments. Continuous support in areas such as internal governance, financial management, and communication is essential for GSIs and local actors to effectively achieve their objectives.

46. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING ACROSS OUR FOUR MODELS.

Capacity-strengthening operates at two levels. First, GSIs enhance their internal structures to better fulfill their missions, requiring funders to rely on them to identify improvement areas. Second, as grantmakers, GSIs facilitate strategies that help local actors recognize their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to determine areas for improvement.

GSIs operating under models 1, 3, and 4 prioritize regranting structures, dedicating resources to develop their capacities for managing regranting and promoting strengthening processes for grantees. GSIs engaged in direct implementation, like those under model 2, allocate resources to strengthen internal structures that allow continued direct implementation in their areas of expertise while creating mechanisms to manage regranting activities, which may introduce additional operational challenges.

Regardless of the model, GSIs aim to strengthen their own capacities in the following areas:

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES:
Developing tools that clearly convey their mission and activities while highlighting grantees' work.

ENGAGEMENT TOOLS:
Creating mechanisms to better sustain interaction with local actors.

RESULTS REFLECTION:
Developing tools to accurately showcase results and learnings from both their work and that of their grantees.

HOW ARE GSIS PROMOTING CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING?

The interviewed GSIs often drawn from their own experiences as grantees, and therefore, support processes that build on existing skills and knowledge while developing new tools and capabilities needed to address emerging challenges:

ACENTO, hosts biannual meetings as collaborative platforms for grantees to address challenges and identify capacity-strengthening needs, supported by multi-year financial arrangements to enhance organizational and strategic capabilities.

FASOL's, Capacity Building and Strengthening Program mobilizes resources for training sessions and knowledge and learning exchanges, equipping grassroots groups with tools for socio-environmental justice projects.

ForumCiv's customizes capacity-strengthening by conducting initial assessments to identify support areas. This tailored approach helps local organizations develop robust policies and internal structures, ensures that learning and capacity enhancement are aligned with each grantee operational realities**.**

KCDF promotes training, mentorship, and technical support to ensure that grantees incorporate learnings into their strategic decisions and prioritize capacity-strengthening within their operational models.

Africa No Filter provides targeted grants and support through their Capacity Building Grants, which focus on skills development and training within the arts, media, culture, and advocacy sectors.

By building robust organizational structures and fostering skills development, GSIs and local partners can effectively tackle their challenges and drive their agendas. Collaboration and networking, discussed in Section 5.4, further enhance these efforts.

5.4 Collaboration and Networking

Just and equitable governance often requires collective action to tackle systemic issues. Collaboration enables stakeholders to unite around common goals, increasing their influence and impact on policies and practices while minimizing duplicative efforts and amplifying overall outcomes. Furthermore, collaborative processes allow local actors—particularly historically underserved communities—to expand their influence and exercise greater agency, facilitating more active participation in decision-making alongside other stakeholders.

Leveraging local knowledge and existing relationships enhances outreach and connects organizations with shared goals, strengthening the overall governance ecosystem. By pooling resources and sharing expertise, these networks foster resilience and create dynamic spaces for collective influence over policy and funding landscapes. Collaborative approaches also promote peer learning, enabling organizations to exchange insights, reflect on successes and failures, and make informed, context-specific decisions that boost efficiency. Additionally, involving multiple stakeholders in decision-making enhances accountability, which is key to strengthening governance.

GSIs suggest that funders enhance communication and coordination among themselves. This practice prevents overlapping efforts and promotes pooling of resources toward shared goals. Additionally, creating spaces for collective learning and networking within the ecosystem fosters stronger collaboration and mitigates fragmented initiatives.

49. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

APPROACHES TO COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Each model depicts strengths when it comes to promoting collaboration and networking efforts. Model 1 GSIs, rooted in civil society and led by local advocates, have closer ties to other organizations, making network-building easier. Model 2 intermediaries, focused on advocacy and direct implementation, possess deep thematic knowledge, enhancing their ability to navigate stakeholder interactions and create collaborative opportunities. GSIs under model 4, with pooled funds from multiple donors, harness broader resources through collaboration, facilitating collective impact initiatives that promote outreach and coordination. Similarly, GSIs under model 3 leverage donor relationships to access wider networks.

HOW ARE GSIS PROMOTING NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION?

GSIs interviewed highlighted the value of collaboration in optimizing resource allocation and addressing shared challenges. However, some expressed concerns about insufficient coordination among funders, leading to overlapping efforts. Additionally, there is a perception of isolation within the ecosystem, underscoring the need for stronger networks to facilitate exchange and mutual learning.

The interviewed GSIs identified the transformative potential of collaborative efforts and networks in addressing challenges and achieving objectives, as these enhance initiative effectiveness and amplify the impact of local actors

Africa No Filter fosters the Africa Narrative Collective, which facilitates connections, skill-building, and collaborative opportunities. The Collective serves as the foundation for ANF's grantmaking efforts, as potential grantees must belong to the Collective to be eligible for grants.

WRAPA employs the Ten Pillar Partners model, selecting diverse grassroots partners, including civil society and women's rights groups. This approach promotes collaboration and shared learning among organizations facing intersecting discrimination, enhancing their collective impact.

FASOL enhances its impact through a voluntary Mentorship Network that collaborates closely with grantees. Mentors maintain continuous contact, supporting and learning from one another while assisting local actors.

ForumCiv organizes multi-sectoral forums to connect grantees with private sector actors, local governments, and civil society organizations. These forums promote dialogue, partnership building, and shared learning, enhancing local actors' capacity to engage with stakeholders.

Collective action is vital for advancing just and equitable governance. Collaboration and networking enhance initiative effectiveness, amplify local impact, build resilience, and promote inclusive decision-making, contributing to GSIs' sustainability—a challenge discussed in Section 5.5.

50. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

5.5 Sustainability

Financial sustainability is vital for GSIs in promoting just and equitable governance. It enables long-term planning and the implementation of strategies to address systemic issues while ensuring organizational autonomy beyond specific relationships. Sustainable GSIs can plan for longer term, be more responsive to innovate, strengthen their impact, and foster trust with local organizations. Sustainability encompasses not only financial stability but also the development of robust internal structures, strong leadership, and a culture of continuous learning. It allows for the allocation of resources to strengthen local actors' ability to participate in governance processes.

GSIs suggest that funders simplify reporting mechanisms. Effective reporting should balance transparency with reduced administrative burdens. Simplified processes allow grantees to communicate achievements, lessons learned, and future needs more effectively, facilitating clearer engagement and resource allocation better aligned with local capacities.

GSIs suggest that funders promote autonomy in resource management and provide unrestricted funding. This allows organizations to manage resources flexibly, set their priorities, and tailor initiatives based on real needs. Unrestricted funding is crucial for adapting to local contexts and challenges, thereby enhancing long-term sustainability.

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Moreover, sustainability is influenced by the broader context in which GSIs operate. Civil society actors must increasingly operate in shrinking civic spaces marked by political constraints and reduced tolerance for non-governmental organizations. Such restrictions can force rapid adaptations that may not be feasible. As organizations struggle to survive, their capacity for mission-driven work diminishes, limiting collaboration opportunities and creating barriers to implementing strategies that contribute to achieving just and equitable governance. This could create a double burden for GSIs, as they need to navigate these complexities while also supporting local organizations in overcoming these challenges. In some cases, this leads to the unintended transfer of risk from donors to GSIs without a corresponding increase in decision-making power.

GSIs suggest that funders remain aware of shrinking civic space and geopolitical dynamics. Civil society organizations face increasingly restrictive civic spaces, fiscal constraints, and political pressures. Geopolitical shifts and regressive policies create additional barriers, with funding often redirected to urgent global crises like conflict-driven humanitarian aid. Funders must recognize these challenges and provide flexible, adaptive support for intermediaries and local organizations to operate effectively.

APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS OUR FOUR MODELS

The structure of GSI greatly influences their financial sustainability. Model 4 intermediaries benefit from pooled funds from multiple philanthropic actors, providing reliable financial backing that allows for programmatic focus, innovation, and strategic risk-taking. Similarly, model 3 intermediaries, established by institutional donors to channel resources into specific regions or fields, enjoy more financial stability that supports mid-term planning and operational security. In contrast, intermediaries under models 1 and 2 often lack secure, long-term funding, posing significant challenges to their sustainability. These GSIs typically rely on continuous grant-seeking, which can consume resources and limit innovative risks. Consequently, diversifying funding sources and developing creative fundraising strategies become essential for their operations.

HOW ARE GSIS PROMOTING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY?

The interviewed GSIs have leveraged their experiences as grantees to gain deeper insights into reporting and financial requirements, effective financial practices, and the challenges that local actors—particularly smaller grassroots groups—face in managing funds. To address these challenges, the GSIs employ various mechanisms to promote sustainability strategies for their grantees.

KCDF fosters sustainable development through its Community Foundation Model and Endowment Funds, providing long-term financial support that enables continuous reinvestment in local communities and strengthens local engagement beyond short-term project cycles. Moreover, KCDF employs targeted calls with established partners to layer funding strategically, reinforcing ongoing initiatives rather than starting a new one each time.

ACENTO promotes sustainability by offering multi-year funding, allowing grantee partners to focus on internal development and long-term planning. This model enables organizations to establish mid-term strategies for capacity-strengthening and outreach.

WRAPA enhances its own financial sustainability by integrating investments, endowments, donations, and membership fees with traditional donor funding. This diversified revenue model supports its mission of promoting women's rights and encourages grantees to adopt similar strategies to sustain their operations.

Sustainability is essential for achieving lasting change within ecosystems, allowing organizations to operate beyond short-term funding. Sustainable GSIs can innovate, plan for the long term, and help local partners become more autonomous. By diversifying financial strategies and offering targeted support, GSIs can build resilience in local organizations, thereby strengthening the ecosystem and driving meaningful, sustained impact.

Section 5 has highlighted various mechanisms through which GSIs shifting power dynamics and enhance local agency, thus contributing to advance just and equitable governance.

Insights from this section emphasize the significance of a trust-based ecosystem where local voices are amplified. GSIs utilize strategies focused on shared decision-making, co-creation, and capacity-strengthening to ensure local actors actively participate in shaping governance structures, challenging traditional power imbalances and promoting community accountability. Moreover, GSIs address systemic issues through diverse funding models that encourage long-term financial stability, enabling innovation and strategic risk-taking. By fostering networks and collaborations, they create spaces for knowledge-sharing and collective problem-solving, reinforcing resilience among local entities.

As governance landscapes evolve, the work of GSIs will be crucial. Their ability to bridge gaps between funding and access can be one pathway to allow historically marginalized communities to reclaim influence over governance processes. By prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration, GSIs should be well-positioned to contribute to creating equitable governance systems, helping pave the way for sustainable and transformative outcomes in their communities.

06. Opportunities and Risks of Working with Global South Intermediaries Championing Just and Equitable Governance

In Section 5, we highlighted the strengths GSIs can offer to localization efforts. However, GSIs are not a one-size-fits-all solution, nor are they the only tool available for funders seeking to transform interactions within philanthropic ecosystems to localize efforts across various subjects, including just and equitable governance.

GSIs are no full substitute for direct support to civil society organizations (CSOs) or grassroots movements. Many funders, especially philanthropies, will still want to adapt their systems to find ways to support local partners directly, not least to reduce administrative layers and overhead and to enhance the precision of fund allocation. However, not all groups will be equipped to meet donor requirements and receive funds directly. Another alternative in such cases, might be to invest in building out more Global-South-based fiscal sponsorship models that can provide fiduciary roles for local partners for a fee, but are not playing any direct role in programming. Such approaches can bridge the gap for organizations that may not be structured to handle large grants but are critical to advancing local sustainable development.

When a donor does determine that it makes sense to partner with a GSI here are some **key opportunities and risks we have identified**.

56. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

Trust, Transparency, and Accountability

OPPORTUNITY:

GSIs possess significant potential to address structural inequities and decentralize power by directly engaging with local organizations. Their position enables them to foster trust-based approaches in funding practices and relationships with communities. By enhancing local agency, GSIs can close gaps with historically underfunded communities and shift power toward local actors. Additionally, their role as both grantees and grantmakers allows them to reflect on the values promoted throughout the funding chain, from funders to beneficiaries, prioritizing transparency and accountability in local governance efforts.

RISK:

GSIs risk replicating the power imbalances they aim to dismantle, potentially becoming gatekeepers rather than facilitators of change. Control-driven practices imposed by funders can lead GSIs to adopt top-down approaches, perpetuating the very hierarchies they seek to address. If intermediaries are perceived as prioritizing donor interests over local needs, relationships with local partners can become strained. Furthermore, a lack of transparent decision-making can disconnect GSIs from local realities, undermining trust and the effectiveness of partnerships.

Bureaucracy and Efficiency

OPPORTUNITY:

GSIs can alleviate the bureaucratic burden for funders by simplifying compliance with local legal and regulatory frameworks. Their deep understanding of local contexts enables them to monitor and evaluate fund use effectively, leading to more sustainable outcomes.

RISK:

Despite efforts to streamline funding, the operational needs of GSIs can consume significant resources, reducing the funds available for regranting. This can result in inefficiencies and slow decision-making. Local organizations may face additional administrative hurdles, especially when intermediaries fail to simplify grant processes or provide adequate support.

Proximity to Local Contexts and Knowledge Gaps

OPPORTUNITY:

GSIs often play a crucial role in distributing funds among smaller organizations. They are typically better positioned than larger foundations to reach grassroots actors, fostering trust-based relationships and navigating cultural nuances. This proximity allows GSIs to implement locally led solutions effectively, ensuring interventions align with community needs.

RISK:

Not all GSIs leverage their proximity effectively. Some maintain only transactional relationships with local groups, offering minimal support beyond administrative functions. When intermediaries lack genuine connections with local actors, their value diminishes, raising the question of whether direct funding to civil society organizations might be more effective.

Recognizing these opportunities and addressing these limitations allows funders to identify when GSIs are the appropriate tool for reaching the local level and when other mechanisms may be more suitable for achieving their goals.

07. Closing Reflection and Emerging Questions

GSIs are not a one-size-fits-all solution nor the sole tool for funders aiming to localize efforts. Nonetheless, they can play a pivotal role in supporting just and equitable governance programming for larger donors. With localized knowledge and strong community ties, GSIs can promote programs tailored to community-specific priorities and needs. They can also enhance transparency and accountability by fostering inclusive, participatory governance that enhances local decision-making and supports equitable collaboration.

Given their strengths and increasing significance, we encourage philanthropic and governmental funders designing governance programming to consider GSIs as strategic partners. These partnerships can align funding initiatives more closely with local priorities, fostering adaptive, locally led solutions. Such an approach bolsters resilience, promotes inclusive decision-making, and advances governance ecosystems that uphold local ownership and equity.

60. **GSIs** working on just and equitable governance

7.1 What is Next? Further Questions

As mentioned earlier, our aim with this scoping is to initiate a conversation around GSIs as their role in the ecosystem continues to grow in significance. The analysis has identified several questions to spark further discussion and study of these organizations and their increasing influence in philanthropic ecosystems and just governance. Below are questions for ecosystem stakeholders—TAI will provide space for funders to discuss these in future conversations:

1. Is there a better term than “intermediary”? Could recognizing different typologies of intermediaries lead to a more accurate or fitting term for these organizations?

2. What qualifies an intermediary organization as “local”? How can we deepen our understanding of localization in the context of GSIs and their roles?

3. Who is active at the intersection of governance and justice? How important is it for these organizations to approach governance work through a lens of justice, and how do they incorporate this perspective into their activities?

4. When is it more advantageous to fund through GSIs rather than providing direct funding? Consider factors like risk management, community engagement, and outreach when assessing the benefits of each approach.

5. How can GSIs meet the rigorous due diligence and financial management requirements of large international foundations? What capacity-strengthening tools and strategies can funders provide to enhance these organizations’ operational capabilities?

6. Should intermediaries, given their specific roles, develop exit strategies? At what point should intermediaries transition out of their roles, and what would this process entail?

7. How can philanthropic foundations ensure that intermediaries reflect their core values (trust, accountability, inclusion) when making grants and working with local organizations? How are these values transferred along the funding chain?

8. What learning agenda should funders develop to evaluate the impact of working through intermediaries effectively? What metrics and evaluation tools should be used to measure success?

9. In what ways can progressive intermediaries transform the landscape of philanthropy? How can intermediaries advocate for more innovative and equitable practices within the philanthropic space?

We invite everyone interested to join the conversation and explore these and any other questions that may be sparked by this study. Your insights and experiences can enrich the collective understanding of how to better engage with GSIs and support just and equitable governance programming at the local level.

Annexes

01. Mapping of intermediaries advancing just and equitable governance in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America here

02. Studies on intermediaries and GSIs

- Comuá. (2023). Transforming philanthropy: Mapping of independent grantmaking organizations for civil society in the areas of socio-environmental justice and community development in Brazil. Retrieved from **here**.
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- Yang, E., Grundhoefe, S., & Smith Arrillaga, E. (2024). Bridging the gap: Grantee perspectives on intermediary funders. Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP). Available **here**.

03. List of interviews

- **ACENTO:** Sylvia Aguilera, Executive Director.
- **Africa No Filter (ANF):** Moky Makura, Executive Director, and Victor Mark- Onyegbu, Head of Grants.
- **Fondo Acción Solidaria (FASOL):** Artemisa Castro, Executive Director.
- **ForumCiv, Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa:** Jackson Obare, Regional Manager.
- **Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF):** Grace Maingi, Executive Director, and Caesar Ngule, Programme Director.
- **Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA):** Saudatu Mahdi, Secretary General.

04. Links to case studies

- **ACENTO** here
- **Africa No Filter (ANF)** here
- **Fondo Acción Solidaria (FASOL)** here
- **ForumCiv, Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa** here
- **Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF)** here
- **Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)** here

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