



GlobalGiving

What Does It Mean To Be Community-Led?

Community Leaders'
Perspectives On Principles,
Practices, And Impacts

Part 1



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Introduction

“Re-thinking,” “re-imagining,” “shifting power” . . . Conversations about doing development differently – and better – abound across the philanthropy and international development sectors these days. As GlobalGiving and the Global Fund for Community Foundations, we have participated in a number of these interrelated discussions and processes, sometimes separately, other times together. To us, one thing seems clear: whether it is explicitly stated or not, underlying all of them is a recognition of the limitations of a development system that has been preoccupied for too long with transactional flows of resources, rather than a lasting transformation of power.

Informing many of these conversations is a growing appreciation of systems thinking, and the idea that lasting transformation depends not on the success of an individual project or organization but on a resilient system made up of multiple diverse actors, and on the full ownership and participation of the people seeking the change.

And so, we come to “community-led” development, a concept which has generated renewed interest in recent years, particularly and most prominently among various international development organizations and networks. Valuable data, analysis, insights have been gathered, and tools shared and refined. However, these have still tended to be framed from the perspective of external organizations, and focused on improving the delivery of specific projects and programmes in terms of implementation, rather than on “community-led-ness” as an observable phenomenon from the perspective of community, away from the “noise” of external funding and projects.

In this research project, therefore, we have deliberately set out to explore the question of what community-led development looks like from the perspective of community leaders. The research, which saw much of the field work carried out under COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, was modest in its scope; the beginning of a conversation rather than emphatically conclusive. But what it offers, we think, is a rich, nuanced – and slightly different type of contribution to the broader discourse on community-led change, which captures not just the voices but also the reflections, insights, and analysis of a group of practitioners whose voices might not always

be heard, as well as some concrete conclusions from the “emergent” side of the development system.

Ultimately, if real progress is to be made towards arriving at a more equitable and effective system, which sees local people driving their own development as co-creators rather than as beneficiaries, and global north actors “doing with” rather than “doing to,” we – no matter where we “sit” in the current system – will need to get better at mobilizing our collective and diverse strengths, experiences and energies, in particular when it comes to genuinely engaging across boundaries and power differentials. We hope that this report in some ways contributes to that effort.

There is nothing remarkable or innovative about community-led work to most community changemakers. To them, it’s the air they breathe. What is problematic to many, however, is the issue of language. Social changemakers who regularly engage with external development actors often become adept at presenting their work in ways that they think funders will understand or want to hear. In particular, they know to avoid talking about soft concepts like relationships, power, and trust. “For years, it has been decided how to talk [using funders’ vocabulary] rather than considering these important values in the organization,” noted Barbara Nöst from the Zambian Governance Foundation. Artemisa Castro Felix, from FASOL, agreed: “These traits – relationships, trust – have never been appreciated, because donors don’t appreciate them. The topics are nothing new. But asking us to put them into words or document it, that’s different.”

The research highlights a disconnect between the dominant discourse of development on the one hand (i.e. English language “development-speak,” forged within funder, NGO, and international development faculties in the global north) and the more nuanced, lived experience of community-led work on the other. This is perhaps nothing new. But it also highlights the importance and exciting possibilities of what might be achieved through more deliberate efforts to strengthen emergent narratives and discourse and to give language and expression to some of the core – if less visible – features of community-led change, and the values, behaviours and cultures that underlie. Certainly, it was striking how participants in the research often were quick to agree with each other – across different country contexts – on the centrality of less tangible, concepts such as trust and dignity.

Finally, we learned a lot from the research methodology itself, about how taking a route less travelled and partnering with practitioners both as experts and interlocutors can produce a different kind of conversation and outcomes, and about the importance (and scarcity) of spaces for dialogue and exchange between those on the margins of mainstream development. According to Shubha Chacko, the research lead in India, the process itself “generated a lot of good will.” Research participants said, “the fact that you want to learn from us was meaningful.”

The process of being community led is itself impact because it is actually how change happens. People coming together, realizing their collective capabilities and agency, and taking action. What they end up doing may oftentimes matter less than the fact that they do it, and if they can apply themselves to one problem or issue, they can do the same in relation to others.

In that sense, community led is as much about a mindset than anything else, a force for change which can apply and be applied across multiple issues: “Everyone can use it. We would like to use it for building leadership capacity, cross-learning among partners, to build solidarity among community-based organizations . . . [who] tend to work in silos,” said Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation.

And for funders and INGOs, the key message here is this: that community led is a way of working that can help produce better outcomes overall, regardless of issue. Researcher Truc Nguyen, from Vietnam, would “love for funders to have more conversations about this” and for Shubha Chacko, investing in community-led work is a no brainer: “I don’t know why people wouldn’t want to put money to community led. It gives more bang for the buck.”

This report is a first step in what we envisage will be a broader process of engagement and consultation. We are pleased to share what we have learned and to invite feedback and suggestions on next steps.

Jenny Hodgson, Global Fund for Community Foundations,
and **Alison Carlman**, GlobalGiving

Executive Summary

GlobalGiving, as part of its mission to make it easier for funders to identify, support, and strengthen community-led approaches, engaged the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) to understand how to define “community-led” and to develop internal tools that would help their team identify community-led grantee organizations. In early 2020, the GFCF team and field partners in six countries engaged in participatory research with knowledgeable local community leaders to explore what community-led approaches look like in practice; to gather evidence of such approaches and their long-term impact; and to discover how funders’ policies and practices promote or inhibit community-led approaches. One output of the research is a set of tools that will help GlobalGiving determine the degree to which organizations are community-led. The Community-Led Assessment is a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire of nine essential characteristics of community-led work (considered universally applicable) and 17 important characteristics (applicable depending on context). The Community-Led Spectrum visualizes these data points according to the community’s role in the work. The other output is a robust set of findings that can help strengthen GlobalGiving’s strategies for supporting community-led efforts.

The full report details the research approach and methods, key findings, the tools and options for operationalizing them, and recommendations for how GlobalGiving can increase support for community-led approaches among funders and other external audiences.

Participatory Research Rationale and Process

Aid agencies and other institutional actors in the development sector have created tools to define and measure different elements of community-led approaches in order to improve their programs. However, these tools may not reflect the community’s perspective or preferences. And, very often, these tools are not systematically built or validated by community members themselves. At best, tools developed outside of communities can miss the nuances of community-led processes and outcomes. At worst, they can contribute to deepening already existing inequities.

To address this concern, and to model the values of our research team, we undertook a participatory action research approach organized around the perspectives and experiences of local community leaders. Working with community leaders in India, Mexico, Nepal, Russia, Vietnam, and Zambia, we co-designed the methodology. We then engaged an additional 67 local leaders in a process of discovery and co-creation of a tool that could help identify and foster community-led development. To validate our findings, we reached outside of the research team for additional feedback and tool testing from peer organizations and individuals with relevant experience and understanding of the research goals. The version delivered with this report reflects our findings.

Key Findings

Research on the practice, evidence, impact, and cultivation of community-led approaches revealed several interrelated insights:

- **Relationships** are the foundation of community-led work and perform a pivotal function in priority setting, project design, and implementation, learning and improvement, organizational operations, and decision-making. Through strong and well-maintained relationships communities govern themselves, identify work that is important to them, commit to long-term results, and hold each other accountable.
- When community members work together on shared goals, they build **trust** and **confidence**, and this helps to foster **growth and change**. Communities often discover a broader range of problems and solutions when they are in the lead and, in turn, individuals can develop a greater sense of personal agency. Specifically, the research highlighted that it is often less about **who** leads or manages, so much as the **process** through which people come together, **how** they are engaged, treated, and made to feel, and it is this that contributes to a sense of ownership.
- Different communities have different goals for **community self-determination and advocacy**. Some focus on developing and strengthening their own vision; others advocate for structural changes at local, regional, or national levels. In these situations, communities form alliances according to their goals and agendas, sometimes having to navigate complex political or cultural dynamics, rather than participate in coalitions to satisfy outside funders or groups. In the same way, while some core features of community-led are widely shared, others are closely tied to specific contexts (such as location, cause, culture, leadership).
- Community-led efforts require strong, collective **leadership** and a commitment to **equity** and sharing **power**. Leadership roles and responsibilities tend to be more fluid than in more institutional-style organizations. Negotiating cultural, interpersonal, political, and other dynamics is a challenge for community-led

organizations, but it is essential for maintaining the flat power structures that cultivate the most creative ideas and the biggest impact.

- The process of being community-led itself creates **impact**. Because they are led by people with knowledge of and respect for community members, their culture, and their context, community-led efforts can be especially agile and **effective**. They are based on local knowledge, relationships, and assets. They have insider-access to systems that affect them. They are oriented toward community timelines instead of externally imposed schedules, allowing people to learn as they go, do work that meets their standard for quality instead of arbitrary performance indicators, and commit to the outcomes. All of this contributes to a process of ongoing learning and long-term capacity development.
- **Funders inhibit** community-led approaches when they impose their own agendas, requirements, and timelines; withhold information; and arbitrarily change funding priorities. **Funders promote** community-led processes when they communicate openly and work in partnership and express patience, an appreciation for and curiosity about local conditions and context, and humility. Flexible funding and non-financial resources are two concrete and important offerings that promote community-led approaches.

Opportunities

The tools and information in this report were designed to help GlobalGiving identify community-led initiatives on the platform, create mechanisms for evaluating and strengthening them, develop program offerings to help organizations connect to and learn from each other, and craft external messaging to drive donor support for community-led approaches.

Beyond its crowdfunding platform, GlobalGiving has an opportunity to leverage its influence among international aid agencies and funders to support the field of people using community-led approaches. By making the Community-Led Assessment Tool widely available, GlobalGiving can encourage data gathering and exchange from different groups, support cohorts that form organically as people share and use the tool, and connect cohorts that may be isolated from each other but have mutual interests. With an ever evolving and growing data set, GlobalGiving can help funders interpret the data and interact with a diverse range of practitioners of community-led approaches. Other uses for the tool may also arise, especially if GlobalGiving proactively seeks to engage a diverse group of collaborators and practitioners. If done in a way that communities' perspectives remain in the center, this effort has the potential to bring together many disparate sectors and generate significant shifts in power, understanding, and outcomes, which are urgently needed to address worsening fractures in today's global society.

Research Goals

GlobalGiving's mission-driven goal for this research is to make it easier for funders to identify, support, and strengthen community-led approaches. To do this, it is necessary to understand what community-led change looks like in practice.

In January 2020, GlobalGiving engaged the GFCF research team to conduct participatory research to explore this topic. The GFCF was tasked with designing a research approach that would yield a set of practical tools GlobalGiving can use to achieve its goal, along with additional findings and recommendations that could help external audiences (such as donors and other intermediary organizations) to cultivate community-led approaches.

How to Use this Report

The question “How do we determine if an organization or initiative is community-led?” is much more complicated than it may appear at face value, as the data in this report illustrate. Understanding how to support community-led approaches is also complex, and it requires on-going conversation and experimentation with those closest to the work.

This report offers two “products” of the research: 1) tools for GlobalGiving to assess the degree to which an organization or initiative is community-led and 2) findings that describe in narrative form the insights partners and participants shared about the practice of being community-led. Each is necessary for a comprehensive view, and we recommend that GlobalGiving leverage both to refine their strategy for supporting community-led initiatives.

This report can also inform conversations and research on the impact of community-led initiatives. Community leaders offered a number of stories and examples to demonstrate why they are convinced that community-led initiatives build and foster the attitudinal and behavioral shifts necessary to achieve long-term goals.

Research Rationale and Approach

Although data and tools exist to help identify and support community-led change in the international aid sector, most have been created by institutional funders, bi-lateral aid agencies, and international non-governmental organizations to help improve their programs. In general, the tools do not reflect the direct experience and perspectives of community leaders and members, nor have community leaders or members had an opportunity to validate them systematically. As a result, they do not fully capture the complexity of the processes that make community-led approaches successful and challenging. GlobalGiving agreed with our assertion that participatory research co-created with credible and knowledgeable local partners would yield more reliable, nuanced, and actionable data, both for GlobalGiving and for the participants themselves.

The GFCF has an extensive network of local partners in the global community philanthropy sector that are committed to the principles and engaged in the practices of shifting power from top-down institutions to local communities and groups. Of this network, field partners were selected in six countries: India, Mexico, Nepal, Russia, Vietnam, and Zambia. In addition to geographic diversity, they also reflect a variety of issue areas and communities, especially those that are marginalized and typically excluded from mainstream development discourse and decision-making. All of the partner organizations are based in the countries where they work; the leaders of these organizations have strong relationships with community members in their regions and first-hand knowledge of local conditions.

Table 1: conditions for community led-initiatives in partners' contexts

| Country | Researcher & Partner Organization | Context |
|----------------|--|---|
| India | Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation | India has a complex and vibrant civil society where social movements are often led entirely by communities. The space for civil society activities is shrinking rapidly under the current government. |
| Mexico | Artemisa Castro Félix, Fondo Acción Solidaria A.C. (FASOL) | A lot of local environmental grassroots community organizing is not dependent on external funding, so there are opportunities to explore how both organizations and movements may be community-led. |
| Nepal | Urmila Shrestha & Upasana Shrestha, Tewa Women's Fund | Nepal is heavily dependent on external aid, and yet there are pockets of community organizing outside the mainstream funding environment. |
| Russia | Juliya Khodorova & Olga Maksimova, CAF Russia | Government restrictions and political culture have closed spaces for external funding, but new opportunities have emerged to galvanize communities around harnessing local resources. |
| Vietnam | Truc Nguyen, Independent Consultant/LIN Center | Vietnam is a middle-income country with an emerging but constrained civil society that is often cut off from global spaces due to language and culture. |
| Zambia | Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation | Much of local civil society has been funder-led for a long time, and conversations around how to change that are just starting to get under way. |

We collaborated with all six field partners throughout the entire process – research design, data collection and analysis, testing and validation of the tools, and production of the final recommendations. Unlike traditional research, in which the data flows from participants to researchers unidirectionally, the explicit intention of this approach was to gather and interpret data collectively, a process that would enhance the value of the information and produce results that everyone, including 67 community leaders that partners interviewed, could use to support their work. Partners followed appropriate protocols to ensure participants' confidentiality as required.

Methods

Phase 1: Research Design (February)

As outlined in the terms of reference, six key questions framed the research:

- 1 What does “community-led” look like in practice, from the perspective of communities?
- 2 How can “community-ledness” be evidenced in objective ways?
- 3 What practical, reliable, valid, (and hopefully, simple) tools can GlobalGiving use to determine the “community-ledness” of specific non-profit organizations or approaches?
- 4 Do communities experience a connection between community-led organizations and long-term impact? What evidence do they give?
- 5 How do funders enhance a non-profit’s ability to be community led?
- 6 How do funders inhibit a non-profit’s ability to be community led?

During the proposal phase of the engagement, we contacted potential field partners to gauge their interest and availability. When the proposal was approved, we finalized the list of six researchers and organizations with GlobalGiving (Table 1). At GlobalGiving’s request, we did not undertake a comprehensive literature review or build on current work on the topic, in order to avoid being influenced by previous initiatives. However, at various points we did review some existing literature and other tools (e.g. the Movement for Community-Led Development assessment, UNICEF minimum standards tool, etc.) to assess our findings in the context of other efforts.

Through Zoom calls with research partners, we discussed key design issues, including definition of terms (in particular “community”), research questions and data collection methods, and criteria for choosing research participants. Based on these conversations, we (GFCF) determined that desired participants would be community leaders who have lived or direct experience with community issues, who value community members’ knowledge, and who promote community members’ agency as determined by field partners and leaders themselves. (See [Appendix A](#)

for the complete list of participant criteria.) We drafted a participant selection guide, a participant information sheet and consent form, and interview and focus group discussion guides, which partners reviewed in preparation for testing the instruments.

In communication with the research team, and with the goal of addressing both depth and breadth of experience in this research, each in-country research partner was entrusted to identify and invite a purposefully selected sample of constituents, which – as a collective, sought to include a diversity of geographies, causes, and experiences – to participate in this research. Moreover, each in-country research partner was encouraged to design their own methodology for gathering feedback that met the following criteria: (1) demonstrates respect for the time, expertise, and effort contributed by the proposed participants; (2) addresses the core research questions and objectives for this research; and (3) can be achieved within GlobalGiving’s constraints of time and budget. In-country partners shared their proposed sample selection strategy and research methods, in advance, for the purpose of peer learning and discussion.

Juliya Khodorova and Olga Maksimova of CAF Russia agreed to test the draft tools through two pilot interviews. They shared their results and recommendations with the partners, and we revised the instruments accordingly. Partners then translated or adapted them as necessary for their context and submitted their field research plans, which included their list of prospective participants and proposed research methodology. We reviewed the plans to ensure consistency in overall design and alignment with the research goals across the six sites.

Phase 2: Data Collection (March–April)

The GFCF believes that shared ownership of data and results is essential to community-led development. As such, we did not want our data collection process to be extractive, which is when communities are viewed as a “source” for data that benefits outsiders. The approach employed sought to ensure that communities were treated as “data actors” rather than “data points.” Beyond setting clear expectations and distributing leadership, learning, and decision-making across all partners, fair and equitable research requires that all partners are valued for their time and contributions. As such, all research partners and participants received payment for their time and effort, as well as clear expectations, in writing, with regards to their expected time commitment. When partners and participants were asked to contribute more than they initially expected, they had a choice between discontinuing the partnership or renegotiating incentives. Finally, all partners and participants in this project were invited to join the learning process via timely and appropriate feedback loops. In addition to showing that we value our partners’ efforts, this iterative, dialogic approach to research is also a form of “member checking”, which enhanced the validity of our research findings.

As data collection began, we facilitated conversations among the field partners so they could share ideas and questions, and we checked in regularly to support them in customizing the tools and methods to fit their situation. Most partners had planned to hold in-person interviews and/or focus groups but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the primary research was conducted online or by telephone. Partners chose to record conversations or take notes depending on their circumstances and participants' preferences. They synthesized their data into reports describing the participants, research methods, and participants' responses to questions in four main categories: characteristics and evidence of community-led work; challenges of community-led work; impact of community-led versus non-community-led efforts; and how funders enhance or inhibit community-led efforts. In total, they interviewed 67 participants from diverse communities (Table 2).

Table 2: Participants & Methods

| Country | Community | Number of Participants | Research Methods |
|----------------|--|------------------------|--|
| India | Sex workers, gender/sexual minorities, beedi workers (also religious minorities), garment workers, bonded laborers, people with disabilities | 12 | 1-1 Interviews (phone) |
| Zambia | Rural and peri-urban communities | 12 | 1-1 Interviews (7 in person, 5 online) |
| Mexico | Indigenous and rural communities | 13 | 1-1 Interviews (phone/online) |
| Vietnam | Various communities (including people with disabilities, LGBTI communities) | 11 | 1-1 Interviews (1 in person, 10 phone/online) |
| Russia | Rural communities | 9 | 1-1 Interviews (3 online), 2 Focus Groups (2 & 4 online) |
| Nepal | Women's groups | 10 | 1-1 Interviews (4 online), Focus Group (6 online) |

Phase 3: Synthesis and Analysis (April-June)

Using the field reports, we conducted a content analysis, which involved interpreting and coding responses to key research questions. Coding was captured in a Google workbook. Each individual spreadsheet within the workbook detailed explicit or clearly implied mentions of a particular phrase and/or concept in one or more of the field reports. The resulting spreadsheets detailed: (1) 59 characteristics indicating community-ledness; (2) 31 characteristics indicating a lack of community-ledness (in some cases these responses were not simply the inverse of community-led characteristics); (3) 28 challenges to being community-led; (4) 30 ways donors can enhance community-led efforts; and (5) 19 ways donors can inhibit community-led efforts. These spreadsheets compared responses across the six field sites.

In group Zoom calls and emails, we shared the content analysis with partners to confirm that the workbook accurately captured and interpreted what they learned and reported from participants. Partners reviewed the data synthesis

and highlighted corrections where necessary. For the most part, partners made corrections that could be evidenced in a particular section of the report. Less frequently, they made corrections when they determined that a response was implied rather than explicitly stated during interviews and/or focus group discussions. We also validated the synthesis to ensure we interpreted key phrases or concepts accurately. For example, in some countries “voluntary” meant that participation in an initiative is not compulsory while in other countries “voluntary” meant that participants do not receive financial compensation.

As one part of the data analysis, we explored key words and concepts mentioned in most or all six of the field reports. The purpose of this step was to distinguish between characteristics that may be broadly deemed important from characteristics that may be context specific. Of the community-led characteristics, nine were mentioned in all six field reports, 12 were mentioned in five reports, 15 were mentioned in four reports, 13 were mentioned in three reports, eight were mentioned in two reports, and just two were mentioned in just one report.

While a mention of a characteristic indicated that it was important, it became clear in conversations with the field partners that just because a characteristic was mentioned in all six country reports did not mean that it was necessarily critical for determining community-ledness. To refine our understanding, we worked with our partners on a survey that could help distinguish characteristics that are essential from those that are optional.

In designing the survey, we sorted the 59 characteristics identified with community-led initiatives into four types:

- 1 Characteristics relating to how community-led initiatives are **structured and led**;
- 2 Characteristics relating to community-led initiatives’ **work/processes**;
- 3 Characteristics relating to core **principles or values** of a community-led initiative.; and
- 4 Characteristics relating to how community-led initiatives are **perceived** (e.g., by insiders or members).

Survey respondents were asked to rate each characteristic using a scale of 1 (definitely eliminate) to 5 (definitely retain).¹ This survey was distributed to field partners, who decided how to collect data based on participants’ schedules, availability, COVID-19 restrictions and other issues. Three answered on behalf of their research participants using what they learned through the interviews

1 Note: The survey was first launched with the following scale: essential (3), important (2), nice to have (1), and not applicable/not important (0). Later, we decided to revise the rating scale to the 1 to 5 rating. 17 responses were submitted using the first scale and another 17 were submitted using the second scale. After comparing the T-values for responses using the two different scales, responses using the second scale were re-coded to the first scale (5=3, 4=2, 3=1, 2=0, 1=0).

and focus groups, and three passed the survey on to participants so they could complete it themselves. The survey was also disseminated to a small number of community leaders who were not involved in the interviews or focus groups but had sufficient understanding of the research purpose and goals. We received a total of 34 responses: 24 from community leaders/research participants from Russia (9), Vietnam(5), and Zambia (10); three from our field partners in India, Mexico, and Nepal; and seven from community leaders working with NGOs and/or community philanthropy organizations in various regions (including Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Romania, and the US).

After recoding survey responses on a scale of zero to three, we calculated the scores. (In cases where we received multiple responses from one country, we took an average so that a differential in number of respondents would not distort the calculation). Next, we calculated the average score for each of the 59 characteristics for community-ledness, to identify which were deemed more important than others. Nine characteristics scored 2.75 or higher, suggesting that respondents consider these to be essential. When we compared these nine characteristics with the results from our content analysis, we found that two were mentioned in six field reports, five were mentioned in five reports, one was mentioned in three reports, and one was mentioned in four reports. Another 20 characteristics scored 2.1 to 2.75, indicating that they are perceived as important to most and essential only in certain contexts.

This refinement of the data highlights the benefit of applying mixed methods in exploratory research. In the process of interpreting the data to develop the tool, we also did a qualitative analysis that illuminated comprehensive major themes that broaden and deepen the context in which these characteristics operate. We explored, interpreted, and synthesized these themes with partners in the course of Zoom calls and emails, and the resulting insights are described in the Key Findings section below.

Phase 4: Tool Design and Testing (July–August)

Using the nine essential and 17 important characteristics, we designed a template to assess the degree to which an organization or initiative is community-led. We shared the template with partners and a GG representative for initial feedback, which was incorporated into an alpha version of the assessment tool. We distributed the alpha version (in Word and Google Forms to accommodate different user needs) and guidance for testing to our six field partners and selected GG staff. We asked this group to complete the assessment according to the guidelines and provide feedback on the usability and effectiveness of the tool, specifically:

- Type of assessment: Can the tool be used to conduct an accurate and reliable self-assessment, peer-assessment, and/or community assessment?
- Type of user: Can it be completed by an individual (for either self or peer assessment), or does it require several people to provide the information?

- Usefulness: How meaningful is the rating scale, and can it serve as a reliable standard to establish a minimum threshold for community-ledness (especially for funders or intermediaries)? What benefits, if any, are there to completing the tool and/or sharing it with co-workers and peers?
- Usability: How easy is it to complete the tool? How clear are the language and instructions, and how much time does it take?

A total of 48 users tested the alpha version and gave feedback. (See Appendix B for testing details and results.) Based on their responses, we believe the tool works best as a self-assessment completed by a knowledgeable representative (or group of representatives) from the organization. Except in special circumstances, organization representatives will have the most in-depth understanding and can answer the questions most reliably and quickly. The tool can be used for peer-assessment, as long as one or more knowledgeable representatives from the organization being assessed provide information.

In the revised version of the tool, we have simplified the definitions and terms, clarified user instructions, reframed the ranking, and reduced the number of comment fields while making them more flexible and open-ended. As described further in the section Operationalizing the Tools, the assessment tool is a work in progress. One option for further development would be to distribute the survey of characteristics to more community leaders and conduct a factor analysis that would help identify relationships/correlations across characteristics. This additional data could help shorten or simplify the tool.

Limitations

Time and budget were the primary constraints on the research. Although the total sample size is relatively small, participants do represent a wide geographic, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic diversity. As noted previously, participants represent marginalized groups that are often overlooked or “spoken for” in development research. It should be noted that U.S. and western European organizations were not a focus because these regions are well-represented and overly influential in international development discourse. However, some U.S.-based organizations did provide data for the survey. The COVID-19 pandemic also presented challenges, as noted in the previous section, but field partners were able to adapt without sacrificing the quality of the data. Lastly, our communication with partners was conducted largely in English, which is our native language and a common language for all of the partners. While we do not think this significantly impeded the research results, our inability to communicate with partners in their native language most likely created some additional burden for them.

Key Research Findings

By design, the Community Self-Assessment tool distills the concept of “community-ledness” into essential characteristics to provide a quantifiable standard for comparing groups and collecting baseline data about groups’ relative strengths and weaknesses. However, as the field reports illustrate, being community-led is a sophisticated and complex practice, involving behaviors, strategies, and results that change over time. The findings and recommendations in this report provide important context and nuance for GlobalGiving to internalize and explore as part of its learning around what community-led looks like and how to support community-led initiatives.

Defining “Community”

One of the first design issues to address was the use of the terms “community” and “community-led.” In discussions, partners expressed a range of opinions about how best to define, translate, and refer to these terms in participant interviews. Eventually we concluded together that the most effective approach would be to give examples and synonyms that would elicit participants’ own definitions and usage.

Some participants defined “community” as the people in geographic proximity that share resources and face common challenges or issues. Others defined it as a group with a shared identity, often but not always in the same place. These types of communities can overlap. The definitions do have nuances that are dependent on the context. In Russia participants said that organizations are also considered part of the community. In India “community” is a complex term that sometimes denotes caste (and is therefore avoided), and other times it is used just among insiders to identify others like them, especially if revealing one’s identity can be dangerous or controversial.

Practice, Evidence, and Impact of “Community-ledness”

The Role of Relationships

One of the key themes arising from the research is that relationships are foundational to community-led organizations. Unlike other types of organizations created and structured to achieve a mission agnostic of local relationships and dynamics, community-led organizations often arise organically as a result of people’s lived experience and shared desire for change. Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha, of Tewa in Nepal, said they “are born out of necessity and passion which focuses on fulfilling the actual need of the community.” A survey respondent in Kenya posited that successful community-led organizations possess “the ability to build relationships based on care and trust for each other and shared development goals. (The) best (organization) positions itself as a local trusted facilitator first and not as a vehicle for the delivery of projects. The organization grows together with the community.”

Trust is paramount and is strengthened through local knowledge or personal experience, respect, and transparency. When asked to describe the characteristics of a community-led effort, participants in India “spoke about commitment to help each other and share what they had with each other. They spoke of gaining the trust of people without making false promises.”² Bonds of mutual respect strengthen an organization and contribute to its resilience: “Even if the organization is having budget constraints, the community supports them because they have built trust.”³

Just as relationships are the seed of community-led organizations, they also drive the process of development. Unlike development approaches in which outside actors impose activities that reflect their agenda and milestones, community-led organizations bring people together to determine their collective priorities, pool their resources, and execute or supervise the work to achieve their shared goals. As Truc Nguyen, field partner in Vietnam, summarized, “a community-led effort is highly self-governed. The community may seek support from other sources; however, they don’t need to abide by someone else’s agenda or management. Most of the work is carried out by the members, from needs assessment to program design to implementation and closure.” Communities may also adopt outside ideas, but they must retain control of the decisions and direction of the project. A survey participant from Costa Rica explained, “It’s fine for the community to get behind an idea that originated elsewhere, so long as the motivation is theirs.”

All partners reported that their participants described some version of this process as a characteristic of community-led change. Even in situations where other institutions might propose an idea or help facilitate planning, as with examples in the Russia report, projects are more likely to succeed when communities are highly

² India field report, Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

³ Nepal field report, Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha, Tewa

involved and organized. Barbara Nöst with the Zambian Governance Foundation agreed: “Interviewees argue that community-led processes are more effective and sustainable, because communities drive the process on their own, resulting in a change initiated by themselves.”

Fostering Growth and Change

As people come together not only to articulate what is important but build confidence and teamwork skills to accomplish their goals, community self-determination becomes an expectation and an established practice, opening up new possibilities. Artemisa Castro Félix of FASOL explained that as people collaborate, “problems are discovered and mapped out more broadly, actual necessities unfold with greater clarity, and new community leaders begin to emerge through participation.” In a similar vein, Barbara Nöst describes the symbiotic nature of a community-led process, which “itself offers opportunities for community empowerment and capacity building and can instill a mind-set change. Such mind-set changes are the result of collaborative internal reflections, creation of self-awareness, and collaborative work.”

Not only do community-led processes build collective agency and confidence, they can have a profound impact on individuals, especially people who have been historically marginalized. Speaking about the skills and confidence gained through involvement in a community-based organization (CBO), one participant in India explained, “We have been like slaves for so many years (as bonded laborers). Now I am a leader who can walk with my head held high. That is what the CBO has done for me.”⁴ A sex worker with a CBO in India said, “I was suicidal because of my situation and then joined the CBO that saved me.”⁵ Shubha Chacko characterized this transformation as a “changed sense of self, from internalized devaluation to understanding oneself as a holder of rights. (It’s) the assertion of agency.”

Community Self-Determination and Advocacy

The research suggested that in some contexts protecting and strengthening the community’s agency to fulfill its own needs and vision is the primary aim. In others, communities not only organize to accomplish internal goals but mobilize and build coalitions to affect broader policy or social changes at a local, regional, or national level. This focus was explicit in reports from Nepal, India, and Mexico.

Because they are rooted in the community and informed by local experience, community-led organizations are credible advocates for community agendas with outside stakeholders and powerbrokers, such as state agencies and larger or

4 India field report, Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

5 *Ibid.*

more institutionalized NGOs. As Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha explained, community-led organizations can interface with the state “to make sure (people’s) issues (have) been heard and addressed at community and national levels . . .” According to participants in Mexico, being community-led confers “an enormous advantage to promote democracy, participation, organization, legitimacy, legality, public and collective interest, (and) political agency.”⁶

In India, CBOs and local NGOs work together to advocate for change, but each plays a distinct and important role. NGOs have the access and formal infrastructure to advocate at the state and national level, which is advantageous for CBOs. However, CBOs must and do lead advocacy efforts at the block and district level. According to Shubha Chacko, “While the role of the NGO in (state or national) advocacy for social change was stated as essential, community members doing this for themselves (locally) was crucial. Society sees the community member themselves playing various roles and then understands them as capable people, thus changing perceptions around these marginalized communities.” One participant described how she and fellow members changed officials’ attitudes through their advocacy skills: “Government officials initially were almost amused. They thought what will these illiterate, Muslim women do? How long will they do this? Now they see us different.”⁷

Whether and how community-led organizations collaborate and build coalitions depends on many contextual factors. For example, in Zambia, international NGOs often coerce partnerships to satisfy their donors’ demands or organizational performance indicators, and community-led organizations can find themselves penalized for being independent and self-directed. As one participant put it, “it is about control by the (outside) organizations . . . If you disagree with the partner organizations, the relationship is gone.”⁸ Local government agencies in Zambia are highly politicized, so working with them can be complicated. In Russia, local government agencies can be helpful partners, providing technical or administrative support, and in communities with a high level of trust, collaboration is more fruitful: “local initiatives attract resources from a wide range of sources and work thanks to the collaboration of many stakeholder groups.”⁹ However, government agencies in Russia also create their own foundations and NGOs with the appearance of community support in order to carry out their agendas.

Leadership, Power, and Equity

Although governance structures vary, in general community-led organizations promote group leadership and responsibility and tend to be less hierarchical. According to Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha, community-led change is

6 Mexico field report, Artemisa Castro Félix, FASOL

7 India field report, Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

8 Zambia field report, Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society

9 Russia field report, Juliya Khodorova and Olga Maksimova, CAF Russia

“a joint effort of a group of people rather than an individual effort (i.e. a handful people with power and position).” Mexico participants indicated that because power structures are flatter, the potential for one person to take control is reduced and tasks are distributed more evenly among community members.¹⁰ In Zambia, one participant explained that “the emphasis is not on who has the power, but how it should be done and who should do it. Community leadership is about teamwork (and) cooperation and less about competition.”¹¹ While the spirit of cooperation was consistent across all six countries, the level of formality varied: in Vietnam community-led organizations were described as being informal or “friendly”, while in India participants stressed the importance of explicit roles and expectations for membership. However, all partners indicated that whether leaders are originally from the community or not is less important than if they exhibit a deep understanding of daily life in the community and respect for people and their customs.

The explicit work of many community-led organizations is to fight injustices and mobilize a collective response. In Nepal, one participant described how a community-led organization stood in solidarity with victims of homophobia: “With (the organization’s) continuous support and proper guidance, those victims have emerged as activists and advocates for their issues on LGBTI and are leading awareness sessions on the ground level while also participating in national dialogues to shed light on the LGBTI community (and) their problems and creating an inclusive society.”¹²

By their nature community-led organizations implicitly promote equity, though the challenge of manifesting this value internally reflects the complexity of cooperative work. In Mexico, when women are leaders in community organizations, women “know their rights (and) men and women strive to live in more equal relationships . . . but when men are leading, it’s more common to find gender and hierarchical differences even at the grassroots and community organizations,” according to Artemisa Castro Félix. In Zambia and Nepal, a heavily patriarchal culture means men tend to dominate leadership positions. In India, one participant stated that “if there is no equality then the CBO is of no use. Everyone’s opinion should count.”¹³ Yet others in the India cohort discussed power struggles that can arise among people with different identities (gender, class, caste, HIV status, etc.), leading to domination by one group over another.

10 Mexico field report, Artemisa Castro Félix, FASOL

11 Zambia field report, Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society

12 Nepal field report, Upasana Shrestha and Urmila Shrestha, Tewa

13 India field report, Shubha Chacko, Solidarity Foundation

Effectiveness and Impact

Community-led organizations are nimble, able to harness local assets and flexible enough to respond to changing situations. Informal organizations in particular can “scale down or scale up their work based on the availability of resources in the community. They are also quick to adapt to change, making necessary adjustments to accommodate arising needs.”¹⁴ Local knowledge contributes to this agility: people who know the community’s needs and priorities first-hand can devise creative solutions even if they lack technical resources. In an example from Vietnam, Truc Nguyen reported a participant’s account of an international NGO that produced a health video for an ethnic community in which the content was so poor that “the community did not understand the message they wanted to get across.’ The (community) group decided to make another video by themselves, which was friendly and warmly received by the community, despite their lack of video production skills.”

Relatedly, partners pointed to access as a reason why community-led approaches deliver long-term results.¹⁵ “Community led organizations are more sustainable and they have strong coordination with different local level entities, while non-community-led organizations require a local organization (as mediator) to know and work in a particular community which is not enough to actually know a community, its characteristics and most importantly its needs.”¹⁶ Many participants insisted that no matter how good-hearted “outsiders” are, there remained a gap in the way “outsiders” think about the problems and solutions compared with “insiders.” As a result, the products and services offered by community-led efforts are used and maintained by the members of the community, reducing the chance of resources going to waste as sometimes happen in non-community-led projects.¹⁷ In the case where repeated interventions are required, “Only the people inside the community could have the patience and commitment to such a long time effort . . . community-led organizations maintain their commitment because they see their stake in the work, such as the health benefits and levels of happiness for themselves or for their loved ones, etc.”¹⁸

Research partners agreed that community-led organizations produce more durable, lasting results, in part because they respond to community timelines rather than the arbitrary or impractical project deadlines imposed by outside organizations. Gaining consensus around plans takes more time but increases the legitimacy of decisions and people’s commitment to see them through.¹⁹ “Respondents believe that community-led initiatives achieve more sustainable long-term results and have a bigger social effect . . . [because] community-led initiatives constantly interact

14 Vietnam field report, Truc Nguyen

15 Nepal field report, Upasana Shrestha and Urmila Shrestha, Tewa

16 *Ibid.*

17 Vietnam field report, Truc Nguyen

18 *Ibid.*

19 Mexico field report, Artemisa Castro Félix, FASOL

with different community members and develop comprehensive solutions to the community problems that help to achieve sustainable long-term results. Community initiatives are aimed at the common good, reaching people, solving important problems.”²⁰

Through community-led efforts, people also learn as they go, which increases their capacity and the long-term impact of their work. “Greater and better distribution of tasks and responsibilities is achieved, leadership capacities are strengthened, trust is created, creativity is used, and teamwork is generated.”²¹ In Zambia, Barbara Nöst, described, “all interviewees see community-led processes primarily as a process that leads to an important mind-set change, which is the most important precondition for a community to start longing for and initiating the much desired change. [. . .]” In India, an interviewee who had been subjected to bonded labor, demonstrated this mindset change for themselves and their community: “We can show that we too are capable. And we do that when we struggle and get our rights and rights of our community members.” “We are no less than them [the educated people],” said another interviewee, a garment worker. “We are capable.”

In Mexico, a participant characterized that mindset shift at the community level as a promotion of political ‘advocacy’, referring to a group or community’s ability to negotiate with different levels of decision-makers (mainly government) about their communities and actions that affect their lives. “It is an enormous advantage to promote democracy, participation, organization, legitimacy, legality, public and collective interest . . .”²² This approach stands in sharp contrast to that of many NGOs, where the outcome is more important than the process. As Juliya Khodorova and Olga Maksimova stated, “sometimes local/municipal administrations create NGOs to achieve their KPIs, which does not have any social effect for community progress or benefit in the long run.”

Community-led processes both require accountability and help promote it. If community members are engaged in setting priorities, planning and executing work, and managing budgets and timelines, they have direct knowledge of who is doing what. Transparency and strong relationships help people hold each other to their commitments and apply resources toward achieving the community’s goals. “Greater transparency is fostered in the use and management of resources, strengthening confidence, spending is prioritized more precisely, self-management and economic autonomy and independence are sought,” described a participant from Mexico. “When the projects are community led efforts, there is a commitment with everybody, it has to do with trust, which is given by all the people to the chosen leader(s). What can be seen is that this trust is more of a moral issue that drives

20 Russia field report, Juliya Khodorova and Olga Maksimova, CAF Russia

21 Mexico field report, Artemisa Castro Félix, FASOL

22 Mexico field report, Artemisa Castro Félix, FASOL

the leaders, knowing that they have to be accountable to all of the community members.”²³

Challenges of Community-Led Approaches

Of course, community-led initiatives face challenges, some of which are inherent in collective organizing and some of which are a result of historical, political, and/or cultural contexts.

Time and Effort

All of the field partners emphasized that community-led approaches take more time and effort than outsider-driven projects: “Discussions (and) creating solutions take a lot of time. In the case of NGOs created by governments, everything happens quickly: they have goals, they have tools, and they have quick results.”²⁴ When communities feel disempowered, people often need some proof that they can create positive change themselves before discussions can even begin. Apathy and hopelessness are common in communities that have faced years of disregard, disrespect, disempowerment and worse from governments, aid organizations, and other institutions. Neglect and paternalism diminish people’s belief in their own capacity and agency, especially when governments or other institutions consider them “mere vehicles to deliver projects,” as Shubha Chacko explained. In Zambia, for example, “(some) communities perceive themselves as recipients. They do not bring their own skills and resources to the table. Instead they expect to be paid (to participate in development projects).”²⁵ Changing self-defeating mindsets (in oneself and others) is arduous work. Depending on the context, it can take enormous diligence over a long period to encourage people to take a risk to work together toward their shared vision.

Insularity and Politics

As the Zambia and Vietnam reports made explicit, people who have been discriminated against by oppressive systems can understandably be suspicious or hostile toward those perceived as outsiders. Insular communities that harbor a distrust of outsiders may close themselves off to new ideas or helpful resources, and they may also not see their own weaknesses. Just as leaders can expand a community’s vision, they can also hamper it with narrow thinking: “Existing community dynamics can be barriers, as they will always influence the outcome of community processes. If community leadership has certain beliefs, these beliefs will be represented in processes/projects. Hence, self-awareness is important.”²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Russia field report, Juliya Khodorova and Olga Maksimova, CAF Russia

²⁵ Zambia field report, Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society

²⁶ *Ibid.*

In any context, weak processes, communication, and relationships can sow discord and foster greed, selfishness, corruption, and power struggles. Zambian participants “mentioned that (external) politics should not be ignored as an important factor, as they heavily influence community dynamics, interrupt and derail processes as well as cause serious conflicts within the community.”

Lack of Leadership Support

Community leaders are often passionate and committed because they believe in people’s power to determine their own future, but many lack support. In four of the country reports participants stated that leaders are often overworked and underappreciated. In Russia, because of public perception that work to benefit the community is “charity” and should be voluntary, leaders can be stigmatized if they take a salary, and they “often experience emotional and professional burnout due to a high workload.” Participants in India, Russia, and Nepal said community members frequently have high and unrealistic expectations of community-led organizations. Without effective communication to manage people’s expectations and share the workload, leaders can become depleted. Also, as Shubha Chacko pointed out, leaders still have to maintain relationships with the community members even when they have to make unpopular decisions, and this takes an emotional toll.

While all the reports emphasized the importance of leadership, participants in some regions also described situations in which very few people were willing or able to take on leadership roles, and some stressed the need for strengthening leadership skills as part and parcel of the work. A participant in Zambia stated that “get(ting) the leadership involved in terms of capacity building” is essential for successful projects. Without broad and deep support for current and future leaders, succession can be another pitfall, especially in more formal organizations. Upasana Shrestha and Urmila Shrestha stated: “Many founders of community-led organizations face difficulty when it’s the time to hand over the leadership. They fail to find the person who has the . . . willingness to bring change and the drive and motivation to lead their community . . . (T)he process becomes complicated because there is uncertainty on whether or not the organizations will move ahead as it had been.”

Lack of Specialized Resources and Funding

As the data indicate, communities can do a lot with little, but all reports stated that lack of funding, administrative or technical resources, and infrastructure for community-led efforts makes the work more challenging. People teach themselves the skills they need, but the learning curve can be steep. Truc Nguyen reported that “most participants said that they became experts by experience and had to learn a lot to make up for the missing knowledge and skills. This characteristic becomes a weakness that hindered their work, preventing them from accessing potential

funding resources, and affecting their ability to reach wider audiences.” Some organizations seek outside help from people with professional training in fundraising, bookkeeping, etc. but cobbling together resources takes time and extra coordination that can detract from their main goals. More broadly, lack of reliable and flexible funding jeopardizes the stability of community-led organizations.

How Funders Inhibit or Promote Community-ledness

When asked how funders can help promote community-led initiatives, the most common answers were “comprehensive” (rather than project-based) support, maintaining transparent and open communication, and holding a long-term view. These responses speak to a need for funders to base their engagement on relationships rather than on the transactional expectation of financial support in exchange for specific project outcomes. As one participant in Zambia recommended to donors: “You need to build a relationship and behave like (communities). For instance, they should not see you as ‘them and us.’ They should see you as a partner.”

Table 3 Helpful & Hurtful Funder Practices

| Helpful Practices: Trust, Knowledge & Flow | Hurtful Practices: Mistrust, Ignorance & Control |
|---|---|
| Flexible funding | Top-down agendas, rigid short-term project focus, and lack of collaboration |
| Open communication | Advice or requirements (e.g. technical or legal) that are impractical, irrelevant, or impossible in the local context |
| Humility and respect | Lack of awareness of power asymmetry (between donors and community-led organizations) |
| Curiosity and willingness to learn | Unrealistic or disruptive timelines |
| Encouraging creative solutions | Withholding information, especially when community members are the source |
| Patience and flexibility | Unexamined assumptions and misperceptions about communities |
| Non-financial resources and support | Arbitrary changes in funding priorities |

Comprehensive Support

Community-led efforts need funding that can be used for more than just narrow “project costs.” Flexible grants to enhance leadership skills, acquire technical expertise, and develop planning and communication mechanisms, etc. can strengthen the organizations and minimize some of the challenges described in previous sections. As Shubha Chacko explained, when organizations are not preoccupied with responding to arbitrary donor expectations and targets, people can operate as change-makers rather than managers.

Beyond financial support, donors can make a positive difference with other assets as well. In several countries, participants encouraged donors to leverage their own

networks to help organizations connect to each other, to other funders, or to other useful resources. As recommended in the Mexico report, donors can flatten power structures and support more creative solutions by “establishing alliances where everyone recognizes their capacities, experiences, abilities, (and) social, material and financial assets.”

This kind of investment brings a bigger return than might be expected because of community-led organizations’ deep local roots and influence. If community-led organizations have the support they need for their own development, not only are they more likely to accomplish their own projects but also to cultivate a culture of collaboration with ripple effects beyond the organization’s work.

Transparent Communication

Donors must be honest with community-led organizations from the start without imposing a top-down agenda. As a participant in Zambia said, “The intentions should be known. What do you (donor) want to achieve?” In fact, consistent and open communication must be a practice throughout the lifespan of the partnership to manage expectations, avoid unspoken assumptions, and clarify needs. “Being as transparent as possible to let people know what can and cannot be done at all levels to reach agreements” is important, as is a clear, gradual, and thoughtfully communicated exit strategy.²⁷

Many participants urged funders to listen openly and humbly to understand communities, their resources, and their customs. They also advised them to be aware of shortcomings and political dynamics that can undermine collaboration. Through lack of knowledge, donors or other outside organizations can easily be manipulated by self-styled leaders who are gatekeepers or do not have the community’s backing. A participant in Zambia warned: “Formal leadership is not equivalent to community leadership,” noting that it was silent but influential women are often the true leaders that outsiders overlook. In short, donors can trigger or exacerbate divisions in a community when they invest trust in leaders that the community as a whole doesn’t respect.

Long-term View

All partners emphasized that, for various reasons, communities and community-led processes operate on different and usually longer timelines than those of donors and outside organizations. Harvest or rainy seasons may impact a project schedule, project planning may require more iterations than expected, government regulations may be a roadblock, or any number of scenarios can transpire. If donors want to see greater success, they need to be more flexible and patient. Funding cycles should

²⁷ Mexico field report, Artemia Castro Félix, FASOL.

better mirror community's timelines – or at least take them into account – to reflect donors' respect for and understanding of the community's day-to-day circumstances, and to increase the likelihood of project success. Donors also need to be realistic about how long change takes. A participant in Zambia advised donors: "They should not be in a hurry. It takes time to get to the right people." Another participant stressed that donors that "take time to learn from the community" are more effective: "(Community members) already have solutions. Find the right people that can be included to lead the initiative based on the skills needed."²⁸

28 Zambia field report, Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society

Community-Led Assessment Tool

The Community-Led Assessment Tool is inherently subjective because it attempts to quantify perceptions, which are impossible to measure objectively. Given this reality, the goal was to design a tool that could provide consistent and standardized data for a discrete set of indicators as one lens through which to understand the practice of being community-led. As described in the Methods section, we have developed and tested the tool using established protocols and have confidence in its reliability based on the testing possible within the scope and timeframe of the research. We present it as a beta version that GlobalGiving can and should continue to test. One option for further development would be to distribute the survey of characteristics to more community leaders and undertake a factor analysis which would help identify relationships/correlations across characteristics. This additional data could help shorten or simplify the tool.

The tool features three main sections:

- 1** Nine essential characteristics of community-led efforts that users rank based on the frequency with which these characteristics are present in their work. Users can enter comments in a text field to indicate challenges or progress in these areas and share data or stories.
 - a** In general, the more frequently organizations are practicing these characteristics, the more community-led their work.
 - b** Users' self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses can be a check on the accuracy of the frequency ranking. For example, if a user indicates her organization always builds trust but she lists "modeling transparency" as a weakness, GlobalGiving can follow up with the organization to understand more about that apparent discrepancy.
- 2** An additional 17 characteristics (plus two blank "other" fields that users can define), of which users select up to five that are most important to their work. Users are asked an open-ended question to explain why these are important and the progress or challenges in promoting them in their work.
- 3** An optional section for users to further reflect on their work and identify necessary resources.

Organizations' Profiles and Spectrum

Partners submitted examples of organizations that feature a variety of community-led characteristics. Initially, partners were asked to categorize the profiles as “community-led” or “not community-led.” However, it became clear after reading the profiles, that the 28 examples fell along a spectrum of community-ledness. As such, we categorized 17 of the organization profiles as **more** community-led and 11 as **less** community-led.

After reviewing a number of conceptual frameworks that explore different aspects of community-ledness, either from an organizational/process perspective or from the community's perspective, we concluded that it would nice to find a way to combine the two. With this in mind, we designed a spectrum that can help an organization visualize how it does its work and help community members visualize their role and relationship with an organization. The spectrum is divided into three columns, starting from the perspective of community members as beneficiaries (the organization does its work *for* the community and community members are meant to benefit from the outcomes) to community members as partners (the organization does its work *with* the community and community members co-create the outcomes) to community members as leaders (the community members themselves take the lead role in the work and drive outcomes). To test this model, we placed the organization profiles provided by our field partners and/or their research participants onto the spectrum. Our partners validated the spectrum and placement of their profiles (see Appendix D).

Next we developed a template of the spectrum incorporating the essential and important characteristics presented on the assessment tool (see Appendix C). The spectrum offers a visual representation of community-led approaches to complement the quantitative and qualitative data from the assessment. In the first column, the organization perceives the community as the beneficiary. In this role, the organization strives to build trust, understand and respect local context, foster community engagement, model transparency, and be flexible in its approach. In the second column, the community is perceived as a partner, and the organizations seeks not only to build trust, understand and respect local context, foster community engagement, model transparency, and be flexible in its approach, but also to build a strong relationship with the community, prioritize community needs and aspirations, and facilitate a change in mindsets. In the last column, the community is perceived as a leader. These organizations exhibit all of the previous characteristics, as well as intentionally cultivate community ownership and ensure that the community makes key decisions. In a similar manner, the spectrum organizes the important, context-dependent characteristics into appropriate columns. Thus, with the data on essential and important characteristics from a completed self-assessment, GlobalGiving or other users can approximate the location of an organization (or initiative) on this spectrum at one point in time.

Operationalizing the Community-Led Assessment Tool

The Community-Led Assessment Tool is designed to help GlobalGiving determine how closely an organization fits the definition of community-led based on key characteristics, which characteristics may be more or less prominent in the organization's work, and how strong or weak an organization may be on certain characteristics.

We do not recommend using the tool to establish a widely applied minimum community-ledness score or threshold, in part because there is no defined value for the scoring, so users will apply their own "grading curve" (i.e. one person's "3" might be another person's "5"). An organization's stage of development might also affect its scores. These factors can skew the overall calculation, making a numeric standard unreliable and discouraging the inclusion of other information (such as knowledge GlobalGiving has gained through interactions with the organization) to determine whether the organization is community-led.

However, GlobalGiving can draw some broad conclusions with the quantitative data. Assessments with scores at either extreme may be revealing. For example, a completed tool that contains mostly scores of "1" or "N/A" would indicate an organization that is not community-led. On the other end of the scale, a tool that contains mostly scores of "5" would suggest exaggeration or misunderstanding the tool. Assessments with scores that fall in the middle or show a range of answers will need to be interpreted, on a case by case basis, using the qualitative data.

By combining the quantitative and qualitative data, GlobalGiving should be able to determine the degree to which an organization is community-led at the time of the assessment. Below is one option for this kind of implementation:

- 1 An organization's representative, or team, completes the assessment when qualifying for funding is not an issue (e.g. after a grant has been given). We recommend this because if potential grantees fill out the assessment to determine whether they qualify for funding, they are more likely to enter scores that favor their chances rather than use the tool for honest self-reflection.²⁹
- 2 GlobalGiving follows up with the organization's representative to have a conversation about their qualitative and quantitative answers, possibly modifying the scores if both parties agree, and then explore options for support. (If GlobalGiving or a peer group has substantial, reliable knowledge about the organization, they may also want to complete an assessment, in advance of this conversation, to compare results; however, most testers reported difficulty completing the tool as an outsider.) If GlobalGiving has concerns about the organization's answers that can't be resolved in a conversation, those are noted.

²⁹ If GlobalGiving decides not to use the assessment to qualify organizations for funding, that should be made explicit in the instructions, so users feel free to be forthright in their answers.

- 3 After a designated period (e.g. yearly or after a project ends), the organization's representative fills out the assessment again to see what may have changed.
- 4 GlobalGiving contacts the organization's representative to discuss the results of the follow-up assessment and explore next steps and opportunities for further support.

Used this way, the tool would allow GlobalGiving to see what community-led activities and processes look like at the level of the individual organization, how effective they are over time and in different circumstances, and what support might help organizations improve their work. For example, an organization that is strong in prioritizing community needs one year but weaker the next might benefit from community mapping or other tools that help people set priorities collectively. This support might come in the form of a grant, through collaboration with another GG grantee, or from some entirely different source. The point is that GlobalGiving can leverage this growing knowledge of the organization to offer a range of resources, including access to networks, knowledge, and other non-monetary assets, that would effectively serve the organization. The cumulative data collected from many different organizations can give GlobalGiving a clearer idea of strategic impact and aid the creation of evaluation tools that reveal different and possibly more targeted ways that GG can help organizations strengthen specific community-led practices.

For large organizations with departments or other compartmentalized teams, we recommend that representatives from individual teams complete separate assessments. GlobalGiving can compare results to determine the degree to which community-led approaches are interwoven throughout the organization and, depending on the situation, help different teams exchange information and ideas.

As the data set grows, GlobalGiving should also be able to define the value for each score and develop a rubric that can be applied consistently. Users would need to understand and follow the rubric to increase the reliability of the scores, and GlobalGiving will still need to vet or harmonize the scores using the qualitative data, though this step should become simpler over time.

Across the GG platform, this data can start to be aggregated to identify patterns by issue area, country/region, community type, stage of development, etc. Different partners could help facilitate this process with users in their networks to increase the breadth and depth of the data set and continue to refine the tool. With a growing body of information, GlobalGiving may develop program offerings for organizations based on a number of contextual factors (e.g. support for start-up organizations, those working in particular geographies, etc.) As an example, Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha, our field partners in Nepal, suggested the tool could help GlobalGiving to connect community-based women's organizations so they can share their ideas and experiences, creating a platform where they expand their horizons in terms of knowledge and alliances. This data can also help GlobalGiving create

targeted messaging for donors to amplify support for community-led approaches and increase the visibility of the field.

Value for Organizations

The majority of testers that completed a self-assessment reported that the questions helped them reflect on their own work and processes. That reflection is valuable, and we recommend that GG choose a format for the tool that allows users to retain a copy of their information for their planning and evaluation, to include on their website or organization profile, or for other purposes.

In the spirit of reciprocity and to provide greater benefit, GlobalGiving might consider offering users something additional in exchange for their time and data. Such offerings might include a real-time report of anonymized data showing how an organization compares to others within a cohort (which could help the organization attract other donors) or an automatically generated list of relevant resources based on the user's responses (e.g. if answers indicate strengths or weaknesses in a particular area, the user would receive a list of resources that correspond to those topics.)

Cultivating Support for Community-led Initiatives

Funding and Non-Financial Resources

The findings in this report suggest that funders can learn an enormous amount from communities and more effectively support community-led initiatives if they work to transform practices and policies that reinforce unjust and counterproductive power imbalances. One way that donors can shift power and see greater impact is to expand their framework for support (both financial and non-financial) and invest in the three targeted areas below. Long-term, these investments will enhance the impact of project funding or even general operating support.

Of course, none of these suggestions should be implemented unilaterally. Funders need to engage in conversations with communities to determine how and whether these ideas are appropriate and beneficial in a particular context.

Relationships

As evidenced throughout this report, maintaining strong relationships is central to a well-functioning community-led effort. The healthier the relationships amongst community members, the stronger the trust, the more effective the accountability mechanisms, and the greater the possibilities for growth. Through grants, convenings, or other means, funders can support activities that strengthen communication (especially working through conflict and change), cooperative governance, and appropriate accountability practices, among others that promote relationship-building.

Leadership

Good leaders build an organization's long-term capacity for self-determination and achievement, in part by inspiring people to imagine and work together toward a different future. Yet leadership skills are often taken for granted, and direct support for leaders is scarce. As Upasana Shrestha and Urmila Shrestha stressed, supporting a team of leaders within community organizations is essential because with so much effort going into uplifting the community, the importance of a strong internal team of up-and-coming leaders can be overshadowed. Funders should

prioritize helping organizations cultivate new leaders – both in quantity and type – to ensure that knowledge is passed on, work is distributed efficiently, and new voices and perspectives are championed. Leaders often need emotional support, encouragement, and new ideas that can come through retreats, training, peer coaching, or simply time away. For a comparatively small investment, funders can support leaders so they operate at maximum capacity to the benefit of all involved.

Awareness and Knowledge

Communities are best suited to identify their own needs and priorities. Although this work is sometimes embedded in project planning and evaluation, “learning” is often reduced to a mechanism to collect data on project results rather than an ongoing process for growth. Funders should consider opportunities to support learning and reflection beyond what is required for the project. Culturally appropriate knowledge exchange can help community members enhance others’ understanding, expand their own views, reduce tendencies toward insularity, and make new connections. If funders approach learning as an intentional practice rather than an afterthought or a due diligence exercise, they can help communities uncover creative solutions that might otherwise be overlooked.

Other Suggestions for Funders

More Money Is not Always Better: “You do not need 3 million dollars to address problems. Support structures and resources at the lowest level. Provide a discretionary fund whose purpose is decided by the people themselves.”

Participant from Zambia report

Work in the Local Language: “Outside funders prefer to work with the organizations which have strong organizational documentation (and) reporting and (are) good in English . . . Such preference . . . leaves out community-led organizations who actually work to address the community needs and problems because they have limited capacity for documentation and reporting.” *Nepal field report*

Meet the People: “Build a real person-to-person relationship and then think how both can work together as partners on behalf of the community or communities.” *Artemisa Castro Félix*; “Often donors meet national level organizations due to time and language limitations, so if they are willing to support the community, they have to meet the community people.” *Urmila Shrestha and Upasana Shrestha*

What's Next

With political, cultural, environmental and economic instability occurring all over the world, systems and institutions are under unprecedented duress. Communities are simultaneously facing existential challenges and seizing opportunities to define and act on their priorities so that they can take back control. The principles and practices through which they achieve this aim can help inform how systems may be rebuilt and transformed. Now more than ever, it is important for the international aid sector to understand and support these community processes and results to help catalyze this long-needed overhaul.

We – GlobalGiving, Global Fund for Community Foundations, and any reader of Part 1 of this report – have a shared opportunity to leverage these tools and resources to advance conversations around shifting power and to elevate those developing the craft of community-led approaches.

In our next phase of this work, we commit to honing the tools themselves, making them publicly available, and seeking to understand what formats would be most useful to potential users. We'll also continue to facilitate connections and exchanges among community-led groups, intermediaries, and funders supporting community-led initiatives. As we work together, those closest to the work will remain the focus.

Appendix A

Participant Criteria

The ideal participants for this research are sometimes called “community leaders,” “lived experience leaders,” “local leaders,” “grassroots activists,” “community organizers,” etc. Because the labels vary and can be interpreted in different ways, we developed this list of criteria to consider participants in terms of their characteristics and qualities.

Partners sought people who:

- Are *both* community members *and* advocates.
- Have direct, first-hand experience, past or present, of pressing issues, community assets, and/or injustice(s), sometimes through multiple identities or roles.
- Activate the knowledge, perspectives, insights, and understanding gathered through their first-hand knowledge and experience to inform, shape, and lead their social purpose work.
- Have deep insights as to the realities of people like them but are able to think beyond their own experiences and see connections in a broader context.
- Collaborate and partner with other local people and appreciate and amplify local assets through project or program design, delivery, governance, evaluation, and decision-making.
- Value connection to their community: they are constantly curious, work to build effective collaborations and partnerships, and remain accountable to their community.
- Might hold different positions (either formal or informal) within a movement, organizations, or agency (e.g., they might be a member, a staff, a volunteer, a leader, a board member, an advisor, etc.). Regardless of their position, they exhibit the characteristics listed above.

The goal was to encourage diverse, rich, and enlightening conversations among people with the most direct experience of the day-to-day reality in the community. We did not focus on the perspectives of NGO staff or other development representatives because they are sometimes removed from the constituents the

organizations or agency serves. We wanted to avoid the pitfalls that can arise when representatives of professional sectors speak on behalf of communities, such as: gatekeeping; “elite capture,” in which one or a few people act as “intermediaries” to concentrate benefits for themselves; and the tendency to cater to the priorities of donors or regulators and, in the process, neglect the priorities of people in the community.

Appendix B

Testing Details & Results

48 people tested the tool and provided feedback: our six field partners, 37 research participants, and five GlobalGiving staff. Most of the tests were self-assessments (evaluating their own organizations). Five people tested the tool as a peer-assessment.

| | # Testers | # Self-Assessments | # Peer-Assessments |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| India | 7 | 7 | 0 |
| Mexico | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| Nepal | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Russia | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Vietnam | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| Zambia | 12 | 12 | 0 |
| GlobalGiving | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| Total | 48 | 44 | 4 |

Self-Assessment

Time to complete the tool: Testers reported that it took anywhere from 10 minutes to 5 days for them to complete the tool, though our field partners noted that on average participants took just over one hour to complete it. Some testers reported that parts of the tool were repetitive or that the extensive number of open-ended questions made it cumbersome to complete. In the revised version, we addressed this by consolidating the 16 open-ended questions in parts I and II to just four.

Complete the tool alone or in a group: At least ten research participants completed the tool with one or more colleagues, but most completed the tool alone. Among those in the latter group, several mentioned that it was difficult to complete all parts by themselves and/or that it would have been better to work with other colleagues to fill out all or part of the tool. Our research partner in India and half of her research participants agreed that “workshopping it” together with organizations team members would have been more productive.

Usability of the tool: While the majority of testers found the tool “clear” and “easy to understand”, some faced challenges. Aside from comments about the amount of time required, a handful of testers found some of the language and/or instructions confusing (i.e., some terms can have different meanings). Another group struggled with the original rating scale. To address these concerns, we clarified some of the instructions, replaced or defined some words, and changed the rating scale from an effectiveness scale to a frequency scale.

Benefits of the tool: All of our field partners and the majority of tool testers said they benefited from engaging in the kind of reflection required to complete the tool. Shubha Chacko reported that, “[completing the tool] allowed them to reflect on how they are doing their work and visualize some changes that they could/would have to do to . . . become more and more community-led.” One research participant in Nepal stated that “it even helped us understand our own organizations in a much better way than we ever did.” Another research participant from Vietnam shared that “the tool is helpful for me to review the needs and activities of the community. It also provides new knowledge and concepts about community-led efforts which is helpful for any community group to answer the question whether they are following the desired direction of the community and whether they want to or not.”

Zambian participants were particularly keen on the tool and how it can guide staff and organizations to improve. One participant from Zambia noted: “It helped me to think much more clearly about the work we do, how we do it, and also how we can do better. It was an enriching experience.” Our research partner in Zambia added that “the assessment tool sets high standards and clearly communicates the various requirements for community-led development to take root.”

Usefulness of the Scoring: While our field partners and GG staff expressed hope that the quantitative data (the self-ratings) could be interpreted reliably, the general consensus was that this would likely require further testing and analysis. The table shows basic analysis of the scores provided on the essential characteristics for community led (Part I of the tool) from 30 test takers who shared their completed tools with us:³⁰

Scores on Essential Factors for Community-Ledness (n=30)

| | Own | Trust | U&R | Priority | Change | Voluntary | Relations | Transp. | Flex | Total |
|---------|-----|-------|-----|----------|--------|-----------|-----------|---------|------|-------|
| Average | 3.6 | 4.0 | 4.1 | 4.2 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 4.0 | 35.6 |
| Max | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 24 |
| Min | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 45 |
| Median | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 35 |

³⁰ The table does not include data from the five GlobalGiving staff that completed an online version of the tool. That data was reviewed separately.

These statistics are most helpful to reveal which characteristics testers tended to struggle with the most (e.g., cultivating community ownership) and which characteristics they may feel more confident about (e.g., prioritizing community needs, relationship-orientation, and modeling transparency). The min-max statistics show the range of scores on each characteristic.

When we asked testers whether they thought it was viable to develop a minimum threshold for scores in order to identify organizations as community-led, some were optimistic and others were skeptical. All generally agreed that it is too early to make this determination. Our field partner in Vietnam felt that it is viable to set a threshold for scores on the essential characteristics but less viable for context-specific (important) factors: "I just wonder whether the ratings in Part II are compulsory and should be calculated as part of the final scores or are they optional, because each organization may have different answers for Part II, while the threshold should apply to same variables." Meanwhile, CAF Russia questioned whether the essential factors are all equal in importance or significance: "Perhaps we need a weighted rating system to set [a] threshold. There should be an additional scoring system that determines the significance of the different criteria."

Either way, our research partner in Zambia cautions intermediaries against rigid interpretation of scores and emphasizes the value of mutual learning that the tool can promote:

"Every organization is working in a different context and different aspects of their work might pose challenges in some contexts but not in other contexts. Currently, we (NGOs in the Global South) are so used to being compared to one set of criteria, which are often used globally (such as the ones used by the EU) which are not useful to local civil society development. I think if an organization does not score well in some areas, it should be good enough to show that they are realizing the importance of it and are working on improving it. There is more value in realizing the potential of a community-led organization or group rather than creating a baseline that might have a negative effect on funding and motivation within the organization . . . I think this tool can help make funders understand the context and the current stage or development of the organization seeking funding. However, openness should be applied, as it should be used as a rigid scheme."

Barbara Nöst, Zambian Governance Foundation

Chase Williams at GlobalGiving questioned whether further testing and analysis of the scores might help to streamline the tool: "I wonder if through more 'in the wild' testing and iteration we can identify key heuristics that can help us to shorten the tool. For example, if we know that an organization scores really high on the characteristic of 'ownership', can we reasonably assume that it will also score high on the 'community decides' characteristic?"

Context-Specific Characteristics: Testers appreciated the opportunity provided in Part II to select characteristics that may be specific to the context of their work, culture, or environment and consider what those choices might reveal. Truc Nguyen shared her view that the choice might reflect an organization’s values. Barbara Nöst wondered if analysis of these choices might reveal similarities and differences within or across countries or regions. And one GlobalGiving staff member showed interest in learning whether there was any overlap in characteristics selected by different staff within the same organizations. With the information provided, we did analyze the context-specific factors that were selected.

The table below shows the percentage of testers from four countries that selected each context specific characteristic of community led. By looking at the table, we can see that “collective effort” was selected by at least half of participants as an important factor in all four countries. We might also note that a rights-based approach was not selected as important in Vietnam while it was in the other three countries. However, our data set is small (with just six data points for three of the four countries and just 12 data points from Zambia), so it is too soon to do more than raise some questions to guide a more robust analysis once additional data can be collected.

Selection of Context-Specific Factors (n=30)

| | India (n=6) | Nepal (n=6) | Vietnam (n=6) | Zambia (n=12) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Collective effort | 50% | 83% | 67% | 75% |
| Rights-based approach | 50% | 67% | | 50% |
| Equity focus | 50% | 67% | 33% | 33% |
| Development of local resources | 33% | 50% | 50% | 58% |
| Alliances or collaborations | 33% | 50% | 50% | 50% |
| Systems approach | | 50% | | 17% |
| Community leader | 33% | 33% | 67% | 42% |
| Community motivation | 33% | 33% | 67% | 42% |
| Space for personal growth | 17% | 17% | | 17% |
| Identity-based | 33% | 17% | 17% | 8% |
| Community management | | 17% | 33% | |
| Place-based | 17% | 17% | | |
| Community decision-maker | 50% | | 17% | 33% |
| Shared norms | 33% | | 33% | 25% |
| Independence | 50% | | 17% | 8% |
| Quality (over targets) | 17% | | 50% | |

Peer-Assessment

Those that tried the tool as a peer assessment generally agreed that it was difficult to complete it in most cases. Artemisa Felix-Castro stated, “I did not feel very confident giving the answers, even though it was an organization I know for several years and we are partners.” Similarly, Truc Nguyen, noted, “I didn’t have adequate data and anecdotes about the organizations.” Barbara Nöst confirmed that in order to conduct a peer-assessment, “one needs an intimate knowledge of the peer organization and its working practices.” Likewise, the only GlobalGiving staff that attempted a peer-assessment, Chase Williams, cautioned, “I can see the tool quickly becoming more difficult to use the less you know about the organizations.”

Our field partners in Russia and Vietnam each conducted one peer assessment on one participant organization that agreed to complete a self-assessment, and then to compare the results. Each provided analysis of the similarities and differences between their own peer-assessment and the participant’s self-assessment:

“CAF managers rated three characteristics higher than the organization itself and two lower. The answers, most often, differed by one point, less often by two points. Differences can be caused by different understanding and interpretation of characteristics and also by different perspectives of assessors, their knowledge of the context of work and processes in the community.” CAF Russia

“Four out of nine [essential factor] ratings matched. For the different ratings, I rated four (very true) while they rated five (extremely true) . . . I believe the participant’s assessment is more reliable than mine, since my ratings were based on static observations about them. In Part 1, although the difference was not substantial, it indicated that I underestimated several areas of the organization which the participant apparently felt strongly about. In Part 2, the different results suggested how subjective an outsider could be when assessing an organization. While most of the additional features I selected were about the description of the organization . . . their selection mainly reflected their values, which I was not familiar with . . .”
Truc Nguyen, Vietnam

Based on their experience, both field partners believe that self-assessments are more reliable than peer-assessments. CAF Russia’s report acknowledged that, “. . . [CAF] program managers feel that their assessment is not entirely correct, since they are not sufficiently immersed in the work and context of the community as to answer the questionnaire.”

Recommendations

Our field partners and the vast majority of participants agree that this tool holds promise for supporting organizations to be community-led and for helping intermediaries to support organizations that are or want to be community led. That said, in an effort to increase the utility of this tool, a handful of recommendations were shared, including:

- **Workshop the self-assessment tool:** Our research partner in India and several participants suggested that organizations may want to “workshop” the tool, that is, complete the tool as a group (with their community, with their entire team, and/or with part of their team).
- **Combined peer and self-assessment:** For intermediaries interested in using the tool, our research partner in Vietnam suggested the following three-phased approach:
 - 1 First, the organization fills out and submits Parts I & II of the self-assessment tool to an intermediary partner or donor.
 - 2 Then, the intermediary organization schedules a meeting (online or offline) to understand the reasons behind the ratings and address any questions or confusion until both organizations are on the same page.
 - 3 At this point, the organizations might propose one or more steps it would like to take to become more community led (Part III).

Appendix C

Spectrum Of Community-Ledness

This spectrum provides a visualization of the essential and important characteristics in the Community-Led Assessment Tool and allows for a comparison of organizations by the role that communities play in the organization's work.

Characteristics in the first column correspond to communities in the beneficiary role: the outcomes of the organization's work are intended to support the community, but the community plays a limited role in the work itself. Characteristics in the second column, the partner role, add to those in the first column. Likewise, characteristics in the third column, in which communities are the leader, add to those in previous columns.

| Community as . . . | | | |
|--------------------|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Factors | Beneficiary (for the community) | Partner (with the community) | Leader (by the community) |
| Essential | | | Cultivates community ownership → |
| Essential | | Facilitates a change in beliefs/outlook | → |
| Essential | Garners community trust | | → |
| Essential | Understands & respects context | | → |
| Essential | | Prioritizes community needs/aspirations | → |
| Essential | Fosters voluntary community engagement | | → |
| Essential | | Is relationship-oriented | → |
| Essential | Models transparency | | → |
| Essential | | Is flexible in its approach | → |
| Important | | Collective effort | → |
| Important | Equity focus | | → |
| Important | Rights-based approach | | → |
| Important | Alliances or Collaborations | | → |
| Important | | Community motivation | → |
| Important | | Community Leader | → |
| Important | | | Community decides → |
| Important | Develop local resources | | → |
| Important | | Independence | → |
| Important | Identity-based | | → |
| Important | Space for personal growth | | → |
| Important | | Shared norms | → |
| Important | Place based | | → |
| Important | Quality over KPIs | | → |
| Important | Systems approach | | → |



About the GFCF

The GFCF works to strengthen, harness and demonstrate the value of community philanthropy as an essential element of community-led development and as a strategy for shifting power. Through small grants, technical support, peer exchange and evidence-based learning, the GFCF helps to strengthen community philanthropy institutions around the world, so that they can fulfill their potential as vehicles for locally-led development, and as part of the larger global infrastructure for progressive social change.



About GlobalGiving

GlobalGiving connects nonprofits, donors, and companies in nearly every country in the world. GlobalGiving helps fellow nonprofits access the funding, tools, training, and support they need to serve their communities. With a mission of transforming aid and philanthropy to accelerate community-led change, GlobalGiving also generates, analyzes, and shares data and learning to make philanthropy more accountable to the people it seeks to serve.

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