

# Reforming International Development

## Interim consultation

‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.’

Arundhati Roy

### Purpose

In this consultation paper, we give emerging findings from a process to reform international development. The goal is to build a shared vision and to form a broad coalition to drive a reformed system of international development. The work has been co-created by multiple stakeholders and is funded by the [H & S Davidson Trust](#).

The process described here forms one of many weaving conversations on the road to the [#ShiftThePower Summit](#) to be held in Bogotá between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

We invite comments and suggestions and set out how you can take part in the next steps of the process.

### Background

The process described here began in September 2022 following the publication of [Increasing Impact in International Development](#). This study conducted by Jigsaw showed that the international development system is dysfunctional and requires extensive reform. The study identified four key areas for intervention:

1. **Move to equal voices:** the need to decolonise official aid and philanthropy is a pre-requisite of progress towards equality in the world
2. **Improve collaboration and knowledge sharing:** the need to reduce competition and siloed working in official aid, philanthropy and civil society and to improve knowledge management
3. **INGOs need to change their role:** reform to stop implementing programmes in local communities in the Global South, while switching to a support role for local actors by assisting with fundraising and advocacy in the Global North
4. **Increase unrestricted funding:** a campaign to educate governments and donors of the benefits of flexible funding.

### Methods

The starting point for our consultation was the four key areas of intervention identified by the Jigsaw research. Combining these four areas with six conditions of systems change identified by FSG Consultants (policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power

dynamics and mental models), <sup>1</sup> the following matrix emerged as a guide to our research and development:

|   | Explicit structural change |           |                | Semi explicit structural changes |                | Transformative change |
|---|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
|   | Policies                   | Practices | Resource flows | Relationships & connections      | Power dynamics | Mental models         |
| 1. More quality funding                   |                            |           |                |                                  |                |                       |
| 2. INGO role change                       |                            |           |                |                                  |                |                       |
| 3. More collaboration & knowledge sharing |                            |           |                |                                  |                |                       |
| 4. Equal voices                           |                            |           |                |                                  |                |                       |

While recognising the value of beginning with an analytical framework to guide systems change, we were also aware that a process that seeks genuine contributions from people involved in the field must be open and porous and allow for results that cannot be predicted in advance. We therefore adopted the approach set out in *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Maree Brown.<sup>2</sup> Described by one reviewer of her book as ‘... a lyrical, explorative, non-linear journey ... for people interested in radical social change, who are willing to think expansively about what the future could look like,’<sup>3</sup> this participative approach contrasts with top-down planning where outcomes are set in advance and progress monitored by performance indicators.

The process we are using has four key components. The first is ‘network development’. The purpose is to build a bespoke constituency of people who want to reform international development. This type of network can be a highly effective means of organisation,<sup>4</sup> and has been the key driver of positive social change since time immemorial.<sup>5</sup>

There is now a loose collection of individuals from different organisations from many parts of the world who have taken part in 11 online sessions who are travelling together on this journey. To supplement these conversations, we are currently [reaching out to people typically excluded](#) from international development consultations – the people we claim to work for – those oppressed by discrimination, marginalised by living in war zones, or those who lack the resources to participate in conferences or Zoom calls.

The second component is ‘Bohm Dialogue’.<sup>6</sup> This is a series of open-ended conversations based on the original Greek meaning of dialogue - which is not to analyse things, to win arguments, or to exchange opinions, but instead is to let go of preconceptions, listen to everyone’s opinions, and to allow a new flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding.

The process aims to get beyond mere talking into action by developing the conditions for emergence of new attributes of a system - the different ways in which people relate to one

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)

<sup>2</sup> Brown, A.M. (2017). *Emergent strategy: shaping change, changing worlds*. Chico, Ca Ak Press.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html>

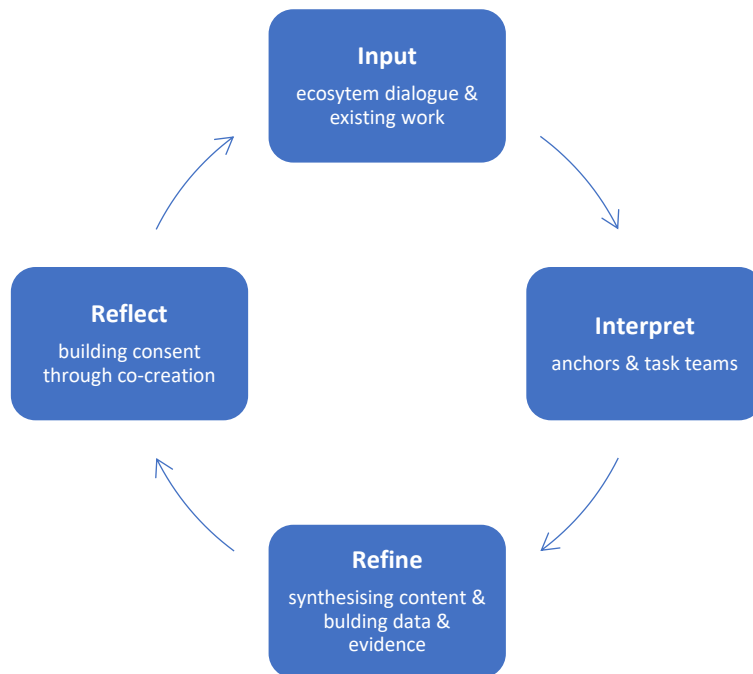
<sup>4</sup> Christakis, N.A. and Fowler, J.H. (2009). *Connected*. Little, Brown Spark

<sup>5</sup> Collins, R. (2009). *The sociology of philosophies*. Harvard University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Bohm, D. and Factor, D. (2015). *Unfolding meaning: a weekend of dialogue with David Bohm*. London:

another and different behaviours, rules, and practices, that arise from the interactions and interconnections of the parts.<sup>7</sup>

The third component is 'building knowledge'. By combining the development of a bespoke constituency and the results of dialogue, knowledge emerges as follows:



The flow chart yields data and evidence for the system that people want. Data from the dialogue sessions is being supplemented by reports, surveys, face-to-face meetings and interviews with funders, development agencies, and civil society to build what a workable system of international development would look like. Wherever possible, we have used the work of others to inform our consultation. For example, in considering the future of INGOS, we have learned from [RINGO](#), rather than embarking on original research ourselves.

While the process is far from perfect, we have developed a co-created process in with many people from different parts of the world. This means that our work has a measure of legitimacy that is rarely available to single author reports from single agencies operating from within a limited sphere of influence.

The fourth component is using the emerging knowledge to influence people in the wider ecosystem of international development. This is comprised of interim reports and articles. These are [published in a portal](#) set up by Alliance magazine. The work will be written up so that it can inform a larger conversation at the #ShiftThePower summit in Bogota.

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<sup>7</sup> Matusov, E. and Pease-Alvarez, L. (2020). Moving from collaboration to critical dialogue in action in education. *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*, 8.

## Organisation

The process has been facilitated by Rebecca Hanshaw and Barry Knight. People who have so far contributed to the process are included in Annex A (to follow and subject to individual approval).

The work has been supported by two working groups. One composed of representatives from the H & S Davidson Trust and Alliance which meets monthly. The other is a task team to support the analysis that includes Moses Isooba from Uganda, Galina Maksimovic from Serbia, and Chandrika Sahai from India.

## Findings

In this section, we set out a summary of six main findings emerging from the process so far:

1. We confirm the findings of the Jigsaw research that there is near-universal acceptance of the idea that the system of international development is broken.
2. There are innumerable conversations going on about how to fix it. The search for 'systems change' is everywhere
3. ['#ShiftThePower'](#) is the most favoured and well documented way forward, with the four main recommendations of the Jigsaw Report centrally important features of a new system
4. Despite all the efforts, progress at reform on the supply-side of the funding relationship is slow and patchy
5. Reform on the demand-side of the relationship is rapid and increasingly effective
6. There are promising signs of new approaches that may produce the kind of system that people want

We will now give more detail on these findings.

### The system is broken

Consultations so far validate the findings of the Jigsaw report that the system of international development is not fit for purpose. This view is widely held at all levels within the sector and no one in any of the 11 online open conversations, face-to-face meetings, or interviews has argued otherwise. There is a widespread literature that supports this view.

To take one particularly vivid example, in [Is the Aid Sector Tèt Anba?](#) (which in Haitian Creole means 'is the aid sector upside down or absurd?'), Marie-Rose Romain Murphy notes:

'The reality of the aid construct is that it is structured and animated towards sustaining itself with an accountability system catering to donors, while it mostly ignores the self-

identified needs of “affected populations” and “the targeted regions” that we “locals” simply know as our communities.’

While Marie-Rose Romain Murphy is here describing Haiti, [which is a paradigm case of international development gone wrong](#), Willie Mpasuka, Executive Director of Rays of Hope, makes a similar point about Malawi:

‘Power is the main barrier, you cannot decolonize the sector when there is such a big power imbalance: they set the agenda, they see themselves as the main drivers of development, and we are auxiliary partners, so in that kind of mindset where would they create the space to listen to you about shifting power? We are vulnerable as developing countries, a huge part of the budget of Malawi relies on development partners, this takes away the agency of them pushing for change.’<sup>8</sup>

Story after story, study after study, shows the ineffectiveness of international aid because the rewards of the system are geared towards the supply-side of the funding relationship rather than those who are meant to benefit. What is remarkable is the length of time that this has been known and the evidence ignored. There are so many references to ‘the failure of aid’ in the academic literature over the past 70 years that to list them would take many pages. Many of these are cited in the Jigsaw report. There are three common threads:

1. Aid reproduces the ‘white saviour’ mentality of colonial times in promoting western values and institutions, while riding roughshod over local cultures, values, capacities and knowledge
2. The top-down approach has mostly been an uncoordinated and unaccountable failure. Such findings apply both to government-inspired and private sector approaches
3. The system ignores past failures and embraces more of the same.

There are signs, at long last, that the failure is being recognised. A landmark occurred in 2022 with the publication of report on [Racism in the Aid Sector](#). The International Development Committee of the British Parliament found that international aid organisations depict the communities they serve as ‘helpless and needy’ and ‘strip them of their dignity’, implying the countries in which they work are ‘inferior to the UK’. Among the recommendations was the need for donors such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office to undertake to shift decision-making power and resources to the communities they work with.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Ennie Chipembere, E. (2023). *NNGO Voices: Leader Perspectives on Locally-Led Development*, Humentum, June. Available from <https://humentum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/NNGO-Voices-Leader-Perspectives-on-Locally-Led-Development-June-2023.pdf>

### Talk of 'systems change' is everywhere

As a consequence of this growing recognition of failure, together with the emergence of the 'permacrisis',<sup>9</sup> in which the interacting problems of climate, economy, health, security and politics demonstrate the irrelevance of the single-issue project, there is now a ferment of talk about 'systems change' or at least a different way of doing things through, for example, 'localisation'.

Every conference in the sector has a session on systems change, and it would be possible to attend a webinar on the topic almost every day. During this consultation, we have been surprised by the sheer number of different organisations and networks that have emerged from civil society to address the issue. Similar conversations are taking place between people with near-identical concerns in small bubbles without each grouping being aware of or learning from one another.

The conversations about systems change have extended beyond civil society to official agencies. For example, UNDP reports on its approach to food and agriculture:

“Systems approaches” have been adopted as the most adequate way to frame and guide the design and implementation of interventions aimed at addressing complex problems, especially in food and agriculture. International development donors, UN agencies, governments, companies, and civil society alike have been increasingly targeting food systems transformation as their ultimate goal.<sup>10</sup>

### #ShiftThePower is seen as the way forward

Top-down projects with a linear model of intervention cannot survive a systems approach. In [Is there a UNDP beyond logframes?](#), Margunn Indreboe, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Botswana, describes the design of a country programme for 2022 to 2026:

‘We wanted to shake things up and challenge ourselves to think differently about our intended impact, relevance and value-add as a key development partner in Botswana. We wanted this plan to not be a plan but a dynamic process of continued sensemaking and design of interventions that learn from each other and change with the pace of change outside UNDP.’

This required becoming 'data-driven digital natives, searching for new solutions' and this led to:

‘..move beyond government and closer to the people, we wanted to build agency and choice, encouraging youth and women, civil society and the private sector to sit in the driving seat of their own futures.’

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<sup>9</sup> Turnbull, N. (2022). *Permacrisis: what it means and why it's word of the year for 2022*. [online] The Conversation. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/permacrisis-what-it-means-and-why-its-word-of-the-year-for-2022-194306>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.undp.org/facs/blog/how-do-we-know-systems-change-we-work-happening>

This perspective goes to the heart of the #ShiftThePower campaign. Begun in 2016 by the Global Fund for Community Foundations at the first #ShiftThePower summit held in Johannesburg in 2016, this seeks to reform the practice of development aid and institutional philanthropy. The objective is to tip the balance of power towards local people and away from external agencies in the delivery of programmes. Such a process is designed to ensure that local people have control over the resources they need to enable them to build the communities they want. It encourages organizations in the development space to become small at the centre and transfer power to the edges. Resources should be allocated based on the principle of ‘subsidiarity’ – a principle that requires that social and political issues are dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution. As Jonathan Glennie, author of *The Future of Aid*, has put it in a recent [article](#):

‘Early in my career a great mentor of mine, Charles Abugre, taught me that when a development project is completed the correct measure of success is not how many kids have gone to the youth club, or how many houses have been built, or arms injected, but how power relationships have changed.’

Such a perspective is essential if international development is to fulfil its long-stated objectives of promoting the freedom of the people it was designed to help, rather than ensnaring them in the continual dependence produced by a charity mindset. As noted by Moses Isooba in [10 Reasons to Reform International Development](#):

‘From the perspective of Africa, international development has often undermined some of the most critical things people need to sustain better lives. Until the late 1990s/early 2000s, many interventions facilitated, and therefore encouraged, the absence of a state’s responsibility, with “development” delivering services which the state should have delivered. In many African countries this has undermined the state-citizen relationship.’

The four main recommendations of the Jigsaw report - promoting equal voices, flexible funding, a revised role for INGOs, and better collaboration and knowledge sharing – fit well under the umbrella of the #ShiftThePower campaign.

An embodiment of this approach is what Trust Africa calls ‘pan-African and feminist philanthropies’. [Immaculate Mugo and Tsitsi Marilyn Midzi explain](#):

‘By “pan-African and feminist philanthropies” we refer to philanthropic narratives and practices that value both every day and institutionalised philanthropic practices in Africa rooted in concepts that prioritise African solidarity, collective action, independence and agency, and ally with African-led efforts to advance inclusive and intersectional political and feminist agendas for justice and liberation of all people of African descent.’

Such an approach, rooted in longstanding cultural African traditions such as Ubuntu, replaces what [Steve Murigi describes](#) as:

‘The archaic worldview that richer nations provide aid to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is fading. And just as well, because the concept of aid and charity binds us to obsolete ideas of scarcity and is often wrapped up in colonial ideologies and legacies. In contrast to the colonial mindset, we need international development to adopt the philosophy of Ubuntu which sees humanity as inherently connected. In essence, your pursuit of justice becomes mine.’

This approach chimes well with Trust Africa’s work. At a global level, this means an approach set out in the concept of [Global Public Investment](#) and its principles of mutuality summed up as ‘all contribute, all benefit, all decide’.

### Slow change on the supply side

Despite all the talk, change in behaviour on the supply-side of the funding relationship is slow. Notwithstanding bold experiments by some organisations, there is a huge gulf between the changes that people said they wanted in the Jigsaw report and the deeply ingrained practice that keeps existing arrangements in play.

A key indicator of progress on the supply-side is progress on [the Grand Bargain](#) - an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations that have ‘committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action, in order to get more means into the hands of people in need’. The latest independent review of progress since the signing of the agreement up to 2022 noted:

‘There was no concrete progress towards a more demand rather than supply-driven humanitarian response; there is an ongoing failure to substantively increase funding to local and national actors; and quality funding is still insufficient to enable the desired step-change in efficiencies and effectiveness.’<sup>11</sup>

To show what this means in practice, we turn to [an open letter written by Ukrainian civil society organisations addressed to international donors and NGOs](#). Part of the letter reads as follows:

‘In Ukraine, almost all humanitarian aid has been provided by 150 local NGOs, church associations and 1,700 newly created volunteer based CSOs...In spite of the fact that the international humanitarian sector has raised many millions of dollars, we have failed to see resources coming our way. In May, the UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS) showed that UN agencies received about two-thirds of humanitarian aid funding to Ukraine. International NGOs received 6% of the funding, while national Ukrainian NGOs received a scant 0.003% of the total amount. This doesn’t factor in the many millions that INGOs have been securing through direct appeals to the public. Yet we are the ones with access, local knowledge, connections, language

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<sup>11</sup> Metcalfe-Hough, V., Wendy Fenton, W. and Manji, F. (2023). The Grand Bargain: An Independent Review, Humanitarian Policy Group, p.13. Available from: [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2023-08/HPG\\_report-Grand Bargain 2023 master rev.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2023-08/HPG_report-Grand_Bargain_2023_master_rev.pdf)



and - most important of all - the personal commitment to saving lives and delivering help no matter what.’<sup>12</sup>

In our consultations people from all sectors, including funders and INGOs, expressed frustration at the lack of change:

‘If the philanthropy and development sector didn’t change during COVID-19, when everything had to go local, when will it ever change?’

‘Typically, work in our fields was funded by bilateral donors. Though there is now a clear recognition that this doesn’t work, and that alternatives need to be recognized and fostered, it is still not happening.’

‘Why is it that, despite good intent, INGOs are still failing? Good people are stuck in bad systems.’

Some influential INGO leaders recognise the importance of these challenges. Dylan Matthews, Chief Executive of Peace Direct, has [written](#):

‘For all of us working in the INGO sector, the calls to reimagine our role and purpose have grown from a whisper to a chorus over the past few years. A response I often hear from people working for INGOs is “is there a role for us in the future”? The feeling of not being useful anymore is an existential fear that all of us probably suffer from in our personal and professional lives.’

In an interview with the Sherwood Way, [Amitabh Behar, Chief Executive of Oxfam India](#), [noted](#):

‘INGOs face multiple challenges in current times. However, the deepest challenges are around fundamental questions of relevance, credibility and impact of INGOs.’

He pointed out that, as an important part of the post war developmental architecture, INGOs once provided the normative moral compass to international development. However, no longer:

‘INGOs have compromised, on upholding the normative moral compass by going after scale and size; by replicating the existing power structures of the unequal and unfair economic and political order; by developing hollow rhetoric around deeply political questions of race, decolonisation and neo-liberal capitalism; on ensuring delivery to the last mile and instead have developed their own flab; and by not sincerely challenging power to hold it to account and democratize it from the perspective of the most excluded and marginalised.’

Given the weight of evidence and opinion about the need to transform the operation of the international development sector, the question becomes: why does the problem persist?

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<sup>12</sup> <https://philanthropy.com.ua/en/program/view/akso-ne-zaraz-koli>

Our consultation has uncovered five main reasons. First, there are no great incentives to change. People enjoy power and rarely give it up unless pressed to do so. There are few, if any, mechanisms to bring funders or INGOs to account by the people who use them so there are limited external forces to provide the imperatives for change. NEAR reviewed the Grand Bargain in March 2023:

‘Based on a “quid pro quo”, the process of Grand Bargain has set itself a very loose, voluntary reporting system. It is based on declarations and affirmations by signatories who are not required to provide any evidence to support their declarations. The process was set up in a way that there is no clear way for any signatory to be held accountable against failure to make progress. The current approach of relying solely on peer pressure to drive change is not sufficient. The result of such practice is that while signatories regularly celebrate change, there is no counterbalance or way for any humanitarian actor to hold signatories to account.’<sup>13</sup>

Second, people who take the major decisions about the roles and operations of funders and INGOs, such as charitable trustees or government ministers, tend to be part of elites who have limited contact with how the work of the institutions play out on the ground. These people invariably want the ‘big wins’ which can be easily communicated. This leads to organisations pursuing size and scale to meet objectives that are essentially remedial for a specific disadvantaged group in society, rather than transformative of the wider ecosystem that has produced and perpetuated the disadvantage in the first place.

Third, myopic self-interest is expressed in the conflation of international aid with national priorities. This was illustrated by the merger between Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID) and its Foreign and Commonwealth Office and by Sweden’s decision to combine the post of minister of aid with minister of trade, to scrap its feminist foreign policy and by announcing its intention to emphasise Swedish interests in its development policy.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, a project mindset is deeply embedded in the way that funders think and therefore how the entire field works. This modality is based on a logic model that assumes a linear progress beginning with inputs, that produce processes, that lead to outputs, that lead onto outcomes, and finally on to impact. The project cycle tends to drive policy, programmes, fundraising, financial management, monitoring, evaluation and learning, as well as the recruitment and deployment of staff. Funders and INGOs fail to see that this machine way of thinking is out of step both with how people in communities live their lives but also the complexity needed to approach problems, which requires systems theory, rather than the magic bullet of project thinking. This demonstrates the power of the old adage, often attributed to Mark Twain, that if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.<sup>15</sup> Failed systems cannot be fixed by projects, though people act as if they can and keep hammering the nail.

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<sup>13</sup> [NEAR - Reflecting on the Grand Bargain After 6 Years](#)

<sup>14</sup> [It’s not too late for Sweden and the UK to reclaim its aid reputation](#) by S. Standfast & D. Sriskandarajah, Devex, 7 December 2022

<sup>15</sup> There is no evidence that Mark Twain ever said this, but I bet he wished he had.

Finally, the internal change required to shift power to the edges requires a completely different way of operating and requires much effort to implement. From a cognitive perspective, shifting power demands INGOs no longer define success via the growth business model which has dominated global economic understanding. On a practical level, shifting power shifts resources. This means reduced income and operating on smaller budgets which as Sabina Basi notes, sharing ADD's transformation experience:

'There are difficult financial withdrawal symptoms from leaving the traditional and highly addictive project-based funding system. How do you sustain the programme staff that you need to design and implement the new participatory grant-making mechanisms, if you don't keep applying for the next project in every country? And how do programme teams find the time to reimagine and design the future in partnership with indigenous disability rights organisations – if they are stuck on the treadmill of project funding delivery and reporting timetables?' <sup>16</sup>

Shifts in funding result in redundancies and role change and this contributes to resistance from 'good people in bad systems'. Many in-country INGO staff are based in:

'...a project world and growth paradigm, where they move into the INGO sector and move up in that sector. Any INGO shrink has a people level impact [and] from a life point of view it's hard to leave and move to a national organisation which finds it hard to sustain the [INGO] salaries. This is legacy problem which is very personal.' <sup>17</sup>

Given these underlying dynamics of the system, it seems that there are considerable barriers in the way of reform. Despite their popularity, and the considerable effort being made to implement them by a range of different organisations, it is clear that the four 'pillars' of the Jigsaw report are not enough to transform a broken system. While we have found excellent work on all of the Jigsaw recommendations, with well-thought through research about how the proposals could be implanted so that the sector becomes more effective, this information does not equip us with the knowledge and tools to overcome the reasons behind why the proposals will be unable to penetrate the status quo and reform the system.<sup>18</sup>

What is clear is that there is no 'low hanging fruit' for transformation because we have to go to the roots of the plant. And the root of the system is power. We have to learn from anti-slavery campaigner, Frederick Douglass who gave a speech in 1857 that included the famous lines:

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<sup>16</sup> [Paying the Price of Transformation](#),

<sup>17</sup> Comment from constituency consultation

<sup>18</sup> We will write up our research on the work going on to implement the four pillars, which contains some superb material about how the sector could operate and we hope this serves to illuminate some of the pathways which support change

‘This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.’<sup>19</sup>

The approach needed is the one set out by Donella Meadows. We cannot seek a simple fix to systems, we must follow Donella Meadows into the complexity of the world and learn to grapple with multiple interacting factors that take in the messiness of self-interest and politics.<sup>20</sup>

So, to the first question: is ‘in the light of these findings, where do we start?’

### Fast change on the demand side

The answer to the question is simple. We look for where change is already happening. If you look closely enough, the world we want is already here. It’s just that we don’t see it because we don’t go to the grassroots of our societies where people are implementing a new vision of what constitutes a good society. Some of you are probably too busy developing or filling out a log-frame to notice!

Many communities are quietly doing it for themselves. While power at the grassroots has been building silently for years, a key transition took place during the pandemic from 2020 to 2022. INGOs were forced to send their staff home, funders stopped regular funding programmes to figure out how to respond to this new topsy-turvy world, and many governments withdrew their programmes. Many communities found themselves on their own and used the only resources they had – volunteer labour to help neighbours on a mutual aid basis.

This forced civil society organisations to take on prominent leadership positions. Instead of using a linear approach to development, they used one based on community philanthropy – collecting money from local people and distributing it to a range of local partners to deliver crisis interventions that focused on two main priorities – food and healthcare. This has led to a new way of working based on an equitable model of power sharing and implementation using network management. These trends, according to a paper jointly written by Peace Direct, Robert Bosch Stiftung, and Humanity United, exposed the fallacy propagated by INGOs that southern civil society is ‘weak’ and demonstrates that ‘...those we “help” have much more power – knowledge, skills, networks – than they are given credit for.’<sup>21</sup>

Extensive data on how the pandemic enabled local communities to take charge of their own destinies is emerging from a longitudinal study involving 65 organisations in 39 countries conducted by the Global Fund for Community Foundations. This has involved surveys at an early in the pandemic in 2020, at a midway point in 2021, and in the aftermath in 2023.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress/>

<sup>20</sup> Meadows, D.H. (2015). *Thinking in systems: A primer*. Illustrated edition ed. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, pp.1–240.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Weaving local peacebuilding into ShiftThePower’ is a document setting out the support available for local peacebuilders to attend the #ShiftThePower summit in Bogotá

Almost all community philanthropies in the surveys reported that the pandemic both changed and strengthened their work.<sup>22</sup> Here are some quotations from the 2023 survey:

‘The pandemic had considerable impact on society, no doubt for that. On the one hand, confidence in official decision-makers and representatives was shaken. On the other, the emergency strengthened the relationship and cooperation between people, and brought to the surface human values such as compassion, sacrifice, help and trust.’

‘We have become more sensitive to the perception of the community, we have improved our skills in reaching out to people in the community, in communication at a distance and in group/cross-sectoral cooperation.’

‘The pandemic was an eye opener to the foundation and the communities as this made both parties to realize the power and strength they had in mobilising their own resources for their development.’

Tracking the data through the three surveys over the three-year period shows that the growth in community power involved five stages. The first stage, evident in the data from surveys in 2020 and 2021, show what can only be described as ‘an awakening’.

‘In all of the bad things that COVID-19 brought, it has also somehow been a wake-up call in the local community about the importance of joint action and self-help. The local community has become more inclined to charitable and philanthropic actions. It led to a development of self-reliant spirit in the community.’

‘The pandemic has awakened communities to realize and appreciate the need for self-reliance and independence from the outside.’

‘It was an eye-opener for the communities to revive values of support and solidarity, and connection with the land.’

The awakening allowed the beginnings of the second stage. This showed that communities contain latent forces of resilience that the organisations had not been aware of:

‘Local communities in this region of Costa Rica – and likely throughout the country – are more resilient than we would have expected.’

‘Our communities are strong, resilient and they are ready to adapt to any situation. COVID-19 has been a steppingstone for them – they have realized the potential they have for dealing with the pandemic and other natural disasters. Communities have shifted the power into their own hands by realizing that they have the solution to their own problems, and they can spearhead their own development initiatives.’

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<sup>22</sup> There are no published reports available yet, but analysis of the survey data is underway.

The third stage began when people began to see that while resilient, communities are also fragile. While resilience and fragility may appear contradictory, the data suggests that fragility and resilience are complementary dynamics - intertwined in a way that is a spur to positive action as people realize their common vulnerability. The recognition of common vulnerability is the third stage:

‘We are fragile, we frequently underestimate the burden of increased efforts during the crisis and overestimate our resilience; we see the lasting impact of COVID-19 on our capacities as a community. There is a huge potential for mobilization and solidarity in times of crisis – we can clearly see this in mass pro-abortion protests during the pandemic and LGBTQ protests in 2020.’

‘Crisis situations always reveal the weakest points of the community. However, this crisis helped to demonstrate the power of local philanthropy, which is very important for changing the paternalistic model of thinking that is characteristic of the inhabitants of the post-Soviet space.’

The recognition that resilience and fragility are mutually reinforcing gave birth to the fourth stage, namely that shared vulnerability builds a sense of interdependence and solidarity:

‘When crisis hits the people will unite around a common cause. People are ready to help even though they themselves might need help.’

‘There is a lot of interdependence between various community members and regions in the country such that our community cannot develop without others. For example, despite our community being far from cities like Nairobi, it also suffered similar economic effects.’

‘There is more solidarity in the community than at first glance.’

‘We have an interconnected state of being – like trees in a forest – our communities are very similar to that in the way they are networked.’

The enhanced sense of solidarity in public spaces meant that organizations had a more receptive audience for moving to the fifth and final stage, which involves building constituencies. This sense of interconnectedness enabled:

‘...new forms of activating local communities and raising funds, for example through social networks.’

‘...it truly all boils down to connection and relationships, because the knowledge gained and powerful alliances built are a generative shared community resource for continuing to resist, find spaces for self-determination and build.’

‘We are working on building resilient and inclusive communities in time of crisis; amplifying stories of giving during the pandemic to inspire communities to take action.’

In sum, a crisis can lead to new roles and better ways of doing things:

‘A community in crisis focuses on the ongoing crisis and gets into solidarity mode quite quickly. Two challenges follow that: how to maintain and prolong such strong solidarity and how not to forget the long-lasting crises. Our community has shown a high level of self-reliability, and civil society has many times during the pandemic replaced the role of the public institutions, literally saving lives.’

### A new world is on its way

During her closing statement at the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre, Brazil, on 25 January 2003 Arundhati Roy said:

‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.’

This statement summarises our findings in the consultation so far. The new world we seek is already here. It is to be found in the day-to-day actions of people working in communities and movements who are pioneering a new way of being, deciding and doing. It exists in practical actions rather than in abstract ideas and is present -if only we choose to see it. A common root is the desire to build systems that favour flourishing lives for all by building assets, capacities and trust at a local level.

At the moment, the movement for change is growing but still small. As Jenny Hodgson who, as Executive Director of the Global Fund for Community Foundations and a leading pioneer of the #ShiftThePower movement, put it in [a recent interview](#) with the Federation of Romanian Community Foundations:

‘Although the idea of community philanthropy as strategy for building assets, agency and trust has grown in visibility and reach in the past few years, there is still a long way to go for it to be considered not just “nice” but “essential” if, that is, we are to realize a future that is “negotiated, participatory and widely owned”.’

In the recent past, and particularly in the regional meetings organised by the Global Fund for Community Foundations and its partners to prepared for the #ShiftThePower summit in Bogotá, there is evidence that community philanthropies across the world are joining feminist, environmental and peacebuilding funds and organisations to use their voices to demand systems change in favour of societies based on the principle of flourishing lives for all. For example, at a meeting in Uganda people from community-based funders from three different African countries described their efforts at advocacy:

‘We have funded organisations to challenge the anti-homosexuality bill.’

‘We are involved in making great attempts to create an enabling environment. i.e., advocating for the passage of bills like the NGO bill, charity bill etc.’

‘We have supported CSOs to convene on efforts to engage Government on space for CSOs.’

These quotations show the political headwinds faced by people working at the grassroots of our societies who want to change systems. A glance at the map developed by [Civicus Monitor](#) shows that in the majority of countries across the world civic space is ‘closed’ ‘repressed’, ‘obstructed’, ‘closing’ or ‘narrowed’ across the world. Only a small number are classed as ‘open’.

What is often called the ‘[closing space for civil society](#)’ is a formidable obstacle to progress. This trend is getting worse and even the Nordic countries, known for their history of progressive attitudes for development, governments are on the turn. In [The worrisome shift to the right of Nordic development cooperation](#), Ann Danaiya Usher describes how, for the first time, a party viewed as being far-right on the political spectrum took over the aid portfolio in Finland and is cutting aid and linking assistance to the return of asylum seekers. She notes:

‘Finland is not the first country in the Nordic region where populist, right-leaning parties and coalitions are dismantling the foundations of their historic development policies.’

These trends are likely to hasten a process which is underway, namely the end of ‘aid’ as it has been traditionally practiced. As Johnathan Glennie points out in *The Future of Aid*, the system of aid is dying, and we need a new narrative to replace the old one.<sup>23</sup>

Such a perspective takes us beyond tokenistic tweaks and technocratic fixes of the system, such as making funding more flexible or improving collaboration and knowledge sharing, to the normative purpose of international development. It takes us back to the basic question about why international development should exist. For this, we need a new story. The old one, dating back to [President Truman’s 1949 speech](#), suggested that the ‘first world’ should develop the ‘third world’. This story has run its course. It is patronising and unfit for the modern world.

As we have seen, a new story is emerging from the bottom of our societies where people are experiencing first-hand what Joanna Macy has called ‘the great unravelling’. This refers to the tipping point where we face environmental, social and political panic. Reading the [2023 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report](#) suggests that the world is close to this point:

‘...the impacts of the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, a weak global economy, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed weaknesses and hindered progress towards the Goals. The report further warns that while lack of progress is universal, it is the world’s poorest and most vulnerable who are experiencing the worst effects of these unprecedented global challenges. It also

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<sup>23</sup> Glennie, J. (2020). *The Future of Aid*. Routledge.



points out areas that need urgent action to rescue the SDGs and deliver meaningful progress for people and the planet by 2030.’

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations commented on the report:

‘Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been.’

The only possible remedy appears to be what Joanna Macy has called ‘the great turning’. This refers to the emergence of new and creative human responses that enable the transition from an ‘industrial growth society’ to a ‘life-sustaining society’. The central plot is for people and organisations to come together to act for the sake of life on Earth.<sup>24</sup>

Such a perspective frames the role of the #ShiftThePower movement as part of a new story for the planet in which the main goal is not economic growth but human flourishing in its widest sense. Going way beyond ‘homo economicus’, the story fulfils the needs of people living in harmony with nature who possess an all-inclusive spirit of friendship and goodwill as an essential component of developing a good society for all its members.<sup>25</sup>

## What’s next?

In the report so far, we have distilled the emerging results from our consultation. This process is far from over and discussions will continue in the autumn and winter of 2023, producing a more comprehensive report for consideration before the Bogotá summit. This document is designed to guide the process and we will use it to provoke discussion and further development of the ideas described here.

We want you to become involved in this. More about this later.

It will be clear from the findings of the consultation so far that there are huge structural barriers in the way of progress in reforming international development. It is easy to become depressed about this, but the permacrisis, and particularly the climate imperative, could be a catalyst for rapid change. We can learn Milton Friedman whose work underpinned the neoliberal revolution of the 1970s:

‘Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.’<sup>26</sup>

A key task for the autumn will be to produce a new story about international development, why it matters and what it would look like. The story should not emphasise on negative criticism of the current system but tell a positive story of the system that people want. As visionary pioneer [Buckminster Fuller](#) put it:

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<sup>24</sup> Macy, J. and Brown, M. Y. (2014). *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects* (Revised ed.). Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

<sup>25</sup> This theme is developed in a forthcoming PSJP publication on ‘The Beloved Community’

<sup>26</sup> Friedman, M. (1962). *Capitalism and freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Preface (1982 edition), p.ix.

‘You never change something by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.’<sup>27</sup>

Our work has already collected many views about the system that people want from people who have taken part in the consultation so far. A powerful starting point is the concept of ‘dignity’, which is a positive way of framing desired outcomes from the work of international development to be in tune with the idea of ‘flourishing lives for all’. We will take part in a conversation about this led by the [Dignity Initiative](#) that is designed to feed into the summit.

We have also found practical examples of people not just talking about what is needed to change the system but starting to put it into practice. Some examples include:

- Global Greengrants Fund. See: [Shifting power starts at home – transforming our organisation to transform the world](#)
- Zambia Governance Foundation. See: [From Unicorn to Zebra: The transformation of ZGF](#)
- Firelight: See: [Change lasts when it comes from within](#)
- Bosch Foundation: See: [When we look at the world today, what do we see?](#)
- Segal Family Foundation. See: [Who we are](#)
- Pledge for Change. See: [The Pledge for Change 2030 re-imagines the role of INGOs in the global humanitarian and development aid system](#)
- PSJP. See forthcoming article by Chandrika Sahai
- Inter–America Foundation. See: [Directly investing in community-led development across Latin America and the Caribbean](#)
- The [Giving for Change](#) programme, which supports civil society organizations from eight countries in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America to develop community philanthropy as a means of social change

We intend to lift up these examples and seek out others – acknowledging that no one entity claims to have ‘got it right or to have all the answers’ - but we will aim to bring the different stories together in a way that amplifies the positive deviance of creative pioneers who are doing things differently.

As more examples take root, we can begin to build a joined-up system in tune with Martin Luther King’s vision of the ‘beloved community’ (a collective way of being in which power is driven by love in which each and every human being is valued as an experimental coincidence between nature and spirit).<sup>28</sup> This stands in contradistinction to the neoliberal

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<sup>27</sup> Cited by Quinn, D. (1999) *Beyond civilization: humanity's next great adventure*, New York, Three Rivers Press, p 137

<sup>28</sup> The ‘beloved community’ is a term first coined by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce (1855-1916) and popularized by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). The beloved community describes a global vision of humans cooperating together in sharing the earth's abundance so that all people thrive. Recently, the animal protection and environmental movements have successfully made the case to broaden the scope of the beloved community to include animal and all other life forms. These include both animate life forms such as trees, plants, insects, soil bacteria, and so forth, as well as to so-called ‘inanimate’ life forms such as lakes, rivers, sky, soil, climate, clouds, mountains, and prairies.

ethic (which sees collective power as driven by economic growth and individual worth gained through career success and organisational aggrandisement).

Through this process, we can build the system we want, rather than talk about the system we don't want. We will aim to create a new common sense about what really matters in the world, so that in time it becomes the default system of being, deciding and doing. This approach follows the work of Michel Foucault, the French post-modern philosopher, who saw power as a positive force because it is everywhere and exists in each and every human transaction.<sup>29</sup> Such a perspective stresses the importance of gaining control of the narrative. Given the current state of ecology, doing so is central to whether humanity chooses to survive or not.

To develop the great turning, we need to put away the emphasis on growth and increasing the budget and measuring material success through the log-frame and see ourselves as animals who respect the natural ecosystem and bring dignity, beauty and justice into the world during each and everything we do. 'Development' should not be seen as part of an industry or project but integrated into who we are and what we do in the world. The main currency for such an approach is not funding; it is energy. Money matters but is only truly effective when driven by moral energy based on movement generosity. The leitmotif is 'no ego, no logo, no silo, and no halo'.

This is not to say that we should reduce the money supply for international development. As Jayati Ghosh and Jonathan Glennie point out in the [first of a series on international finance for Global Nation](#):

'Everyone now seems to recognise that the urgent and complex challenges the world faces today require international cooperation and much more finance. We need not just billions but trillions of dollars to overcome threats to our survival and wellbeing, and to build the world we want.'

What we need, however, is to use the finance in a more effective way based on the principle of international cooperation that ensures that much less of it gets lost in transaction costs expended by agencies on the supply-side. This perspective leads us to a different kind of politics that implicates civil society, philanthropy and official development organisations in politics in a central way. The politics we need has been helpfully described in an [article by Amitabh Behar](#), chief executive of Oxfam India who describes two types of politics based on:

'... the distinction between political action for political power on the one hand; and political action for furthering rights, development, human dignity, constitutional values, and democracy, on the other.'

Amitabh Behar points out the Supreme Court of India has ruled that political work furthering rights, development, human dignity, constitutional values, and democracy is legitimate work for civil society.<sup>30</sup> Such a ruling is important because it offers comfort to

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. London, Penguin.

<sup>30</sup> Amitabh Behar says: 'The Supreme Court of India's [verdict](#) in the case of INSAF (Indian Social Action Forum) challenging the FCRA ([Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2011](#)) on March 6, 2020, was one of the most

philanthropies who feel that engaging in politics would put their charitable status at risk. On this basis, funders can legitimately support the #ShiftThePower movement.

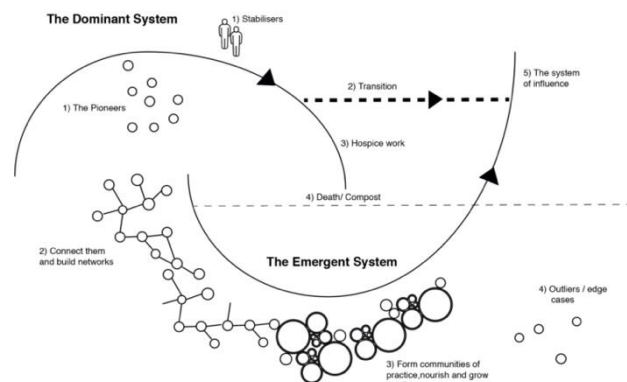
Work to #ShiftThePower is a high priority because our consultation has established that the dominant system of international development fails the tests of democracy and human rights. It should be replaced by an emergent system that puts these qualities at its heart.

This brings us to the Berkana two-loop model of systems change.<sup>31</sup> This shows that in any system there are two forces – dominance and emergence. As the dominant system starts to fail and collapse, alternatives begin to emerge. The model highlights how we need to look both at the growth of emergent forces and at the decay of dominant forces. This frame helps us to see where we need to work in order to emerge as a ‘system of influence’.

Two key questions arise: one is ‘how do we nurture emergence of the new?’ The other is ‘how do we hospice the old?’ Both these questions matter because the transition must be driven by compassion for all those involved. Time and again during this consultation, we have heard the expression ‘good people trapped in bad systems’.

There is no quick or easy answer to this. Ashby’s law of requisite variety, which informs much of systems theory, states that the solution to any problem must be equal to or more complex than the problem.<sup>32</sup> And, in international aid, we are dealing not only with a complex system but also a chaotic one. This means that there is not a single or simple answer. We need to move the system each and every day, not in accord with a grand plan, but by recognising and letting go of our power in favour of the society we want.

We must work together to shepherd change and simultaneously to steward loss. While we keep the system stable, we must build a new system where dignity for all prevails. This involves letting go of our individual and organisational interests and deciding what really matters is the wider ecosystem. As systems guru Donella Meadows put it, we need to [come dancing with systems](#).



decisive affirmations of civil society’s role as a political actor in India. The judgement reaffirmed the legitimate and critical role civil society has to play to ensure that democracy in India thrives, including through political action.’

<sup>31</sup> Wheatley, M. (2006). *Margaret J. Wheatley: Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale*. [online] [www.margaretwheatley.com](http://www.margaretwheatley.com). Available at: <https://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html> [Accessed 15 February, 2023].

<sup>32</sup> Ashby, W.R. (1956). *An Introduction to Cybernetics*. John Wiley and Sons. <https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.5851>

## How to get involved

- Share this document and send comments and thoughts on what resonates and what's missing via [rid@gmail.com](mailto:rid@gmail.com)
- Share the crowdsourcing invitation with your community and activist networks to ensure their input. This is available in various languages [here](#)
- Share further examples of 'positive deviance' and current activities supporting the four pillars outlined in the Jigsaw Report, so pathways on how to create and nurture change are amplified.
- Participate in constituency conversations which will take place on:
  - 21<sup>st</sup> September – 10.30 – 11.30 UTC
  - 22<sup>nd</sup> September – 09.00 – 10.00 UTC
  - 28<sup>th</sup> September – 13.00 – 14.00 UTC
  - 29<sup>th</sup> September – 13.30 – 14.30 UTC

These will be smaller conversations for 7-8 people to discuss the results of the consultation so far and how its findings can be put into practice.

Meeting preferences will be allocated on a first come first served basis and if required, additional meetings will be scheduled.

- Contribute to the conversation and data collection by writing an article for Alliance or by commenting on existing pieces on the [portal](#) to share different perspectives and stimulate debate.