

The AIDN Beat

Twenty-four thought leadership pieces on the complexities, trends and future of the (Australian) international development sector written between September 2023 and September 2024.



Image: Women in Vietnam. Photo by [Ives Ives](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Introduction

We are thrilled to mark the one-year anniversary of The AIDN Beat.

AIDN's core ethos is 'more' and 'better' global giving. However, at AIDN we are aware that 'better' and 'more' are evolving and subjective terms. We are also deeply committed to amplifying diverse voices. The AIDN Beat is a key way to achieve this goal, and strives to be an inclusive space for thought leadership pieces that explore the complexities, trends, and future of the Australian international development sector.

Since launching last September, we have been amazed by the interest and uptake of The AIDN Beat. We've published *twenty-four* thought pieces over the last year.

To celebrate, we've compiled all the pieces into this PDF booklet, so you can revisit the rich insights shared by our contributors.

As we move forward, we also want to extend an open invitation to anyone with ideas, or insights about our sector. You don't need to be a seasoned leader, expert or a researcher; we're here to help amplify your voice. Let's continue to work together to bring fresh ideas and diverse viewpoints to the forefront!

If you would like to submit a thought leadership piece for The AIDN Beat, then please get in touch with The AIDN Beat's Editor, Hannah (via hannah@aidnetwork.org.au), and we will share our editorial guidelines.

With thanks,
The AIDN Team

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#1. Why now is the time for Australians to add overseas giving to their portfolio.



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In this special edition three-part series, the team at AIDN argue that the case for global giving has never been more compelling.

From responding to urgent humanitarian needs, to increasingly interconnected global issues, to greater ‘bang for your buck’, in [Part 1](#) AIDN explores ‘why’ all Australian donors should consider adding international giving to their giving portfolio. In [Part 2](#), AIDN highlights and calls for a breakdown of the stubborn, inflated barriers that challenge Australia’s outbound charitable giving. Finally, in [Part 3](#) AIDN explores the ‘how to’ and provides the first steps all Australian donors can take to launch their global giving journey.

This series is based on AIDN’s three-part flagship series ‘[The Compelling Case for Global Giving](#)’.

In Kenya, 35.6% of the population lives in extreme poverty or on less than US\$1.90 per day (World Food Program [2023](#)). More than 23 million Kenyan children go to school hungry each day (Global Citizen [2018](#)). This lack of nutrition makes learning extremely difficult and creates a profoundly unequal education system. Responding to this inequality, and after obtaining a degree from the University of South Australia, in 2012 32 year old Wawira Njiru founded [Food4Education](#) (pictured below). Today, Food4Education is feeding Africa’s future and has led to improved nutrition, school attendance, performance and higher high school transition rates. The program currently supplies meals to 150,000 school children a day – with this figure estimated to grow to 400,000 after a recent partnership was announced with Nairobi County (The Guardian [2023](#)).

7424 km from Kenya in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, Maggie Eno was unable to turn a blind eye to vulnerable children sleeping under the ‘Tapang’ tree. In 2003, she co-founded [M’Lop Tapang](#) in order to fill the huge gap in services to children and youth who were living on the streets, unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation. Today, M’Lop Tapang provides holistic services to over 5,000 children and youth, 2500 families, and their community with 210 local Cambodian staff.

Food4Education and M’Lop Tapang are just two of thousands, if not tens-of-thousands, of stories that demonstrate the innovative and deeply impactful work being done beyond Australian shores to address inequality. Indeed, there is an increasingly compelling case for global giving or for Australian donors to add international giving to their portfolio.

#1. Why now is the time for Australians to add overseas giving to their portfolio

Many of the issues our world faces today are inherently global in nature and no country lives in a vacuum. Whilst COVID-19 originated overseas – it quickly became apparent that unless Australia strived for global vaccine equity Australia’s own health system would crumble. Climate change has only reinforced this message. It has been shown that the lowest emitters will be hit hardest by climate change due to the actions (or inaction) of high-income countries. We now know that women in low-income countries will also be disproportionately impacted by climate change (Scotland [2020](#), The Guardian). Climate change will also impact our own shores – with food sources threatened, extreme weather, and increased immigration as numbers of climate refugees rise. By supporting international organisations, Australian donors can contribute to addressing these pressing global issues and make a positive impact on a larger scale.

In recent years, the geopolitical environment has also become uncertain and Australia has witnessed the rise of new powers in the Pacific. This has resulted in aid taking a more prominent role in Australia’s foreign policy in order to foster regional allegiances, peace and security. However, as many of our regional neighbours face serious issues such as rising poverty and gender inequality there is also an inherent, moral argument for Australians to increase global giving (McNicol, [2023](#)). In fact, urgent needs abroad are only on the rise. It is estimated that a record 339 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2023 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [2022](#)).

Australia must also reflect on our own unique economic privileges and how this should impact our relations with other nations. Latest estimates suggest that the wealthiest 10% of people in the world own 76% of total wealth (Christensen, Lelourec, Development Initiatives [2023](#)). The Covid-19 pandemic further contributed to a rise in the unequal distribution of wealth and in high-income countries, like Australia, billionaires doubled their wealth during Covid pandemic (Forbes, [2022](#)). In this context, Evelyn Omala from [Partners For Equity](#), believes that the narrative of ‘Should I give internationally?’ must shift urgently ‘How can I give internationally?’.



Image: Food for Education CEO Wawera Njeru, Mombasa county governor Abdulswamad Nassir and Nyali MP Mohamed Ali serving learners during the official launching of the program in Mombasa at Pwani school of children with physically challenged
Source: [Aura Ruth/The Star](#)

#1. Why now is the time for Australians to add overseas giving to their portfolio

Finally, a further aspect to consider is that when you give overseas you get a greater ‘bang for your buck’. This does not mean neglecting domestic causes, but rather recognising that donations to effective organisations in low-income countries can achieve significant results with fewer dollars. This is the basis of renowned philosopher Peter Singer’s [A Life You Can Save](#). For example, at [St Judes](#) in Tanzania it costs \$2880 (AUD) to sponsor a student’s education and ensure three meals a day for one year. 97% of the graduates at St Judes move on to tertiary education. In Australia, a similar level of (private) education costs up to \$35,000 a year. You could also fund a more basic education in Africa or Asia for around \$500 a year. This cost-benefit equation should take place when Australians are contemplating their donor portfolio. Donors can still align their global giving with the domestic causes they care about, for example education or women’s health, but can simultaneously diversify their investments and witness the extended impact of overseas giving. It is also a unique opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and to learn more about how innovators beyond our shores are creatively addressing social issues.

At AIDN, we believe in ‘more’ and ‘better’ giving to development outcomes. In particular, we believe that there is a compelling case for global giving as it becomes increasingly clearer that the issues we face domestically are inherently cross-border in nature. For those looking to start their global giving journey please feel free to get in touch with us.



Image: M'Lop Tapang, Cambodia. Source: [M'LopTapang](#)

#2. Let's dispel the stubborn myths around global giving.



Mark Cubit,
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This series is based on AIDN's three-part flagship series '[The Compelling Case for Global Giving](#)'.

In Part 1 of this special series, the Australian International Development Network (AIDN) team argued that there has never been a more compelling case for global giving. From responding to urgent on-the-ground humanitarian needs, to shifting geopolitics, to greater 'bang for your buck', all Australians should consider enriching and internationalising their giving portfolio. That is what we are all about at the AIDN.

However, despite these diverse and compelling reasons to give globally, currently, international philanthropy only accounts for ~10c in every dollar of giving by Australians. According to [JBWere's](#) John McLeod, since the Australian Charities and NFPs Commission ([ACNC](#)) commenced collecting data on Australian donations in 2014, there has been an overall downturn trend. Whilst the value of tax-deductible donations has increased over the past decade, Australia is becoming less generous, with the actual number of people claiming tax deductible donations falling to its lowest level since the 1970s (Social Ventures Australia [2021](#), ATO data). Essentially, fewer people are giving but those who are giving are giving more. This poses a serious issue for international development which relies on 70-75% of its income from retail fundraising. Compounding this is Australia's falling government commitment to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Whilst global ODA surged to an all-time high of USD 204 billion in 2022 – Australia ranked 28th (OECD 2023).

These damning statistics represent the fact that a range of stubborn, inflated misconceptions continue to create barriers that undermine Australia's appetite for international giving. It's time we break down these barriers.

#2. Let's dispel the stubborn myths around global giving

A Matter of Trust

Issues of trust remain a significant obstacle to a sustained flow of giving from Australians to overseas causes. For a conventional market to work effectively, consumers need adequate information about the price, quality and characteristics of goods and services on offer, and confidence that they will get what they paid for. Donors similarly need adequate information to feel secure when they give (Australian Philanthropy Productivity Commission ToR [2023](#)). This situation is only amplified in the context of international giving. AIDN repeatedly encounters the same critical questions including 'How do I know if my money gets there? How do I know if my money will be spent prudently? Who can I trust?'. Issues such as embezzlement and corruption are also regularly flagged.

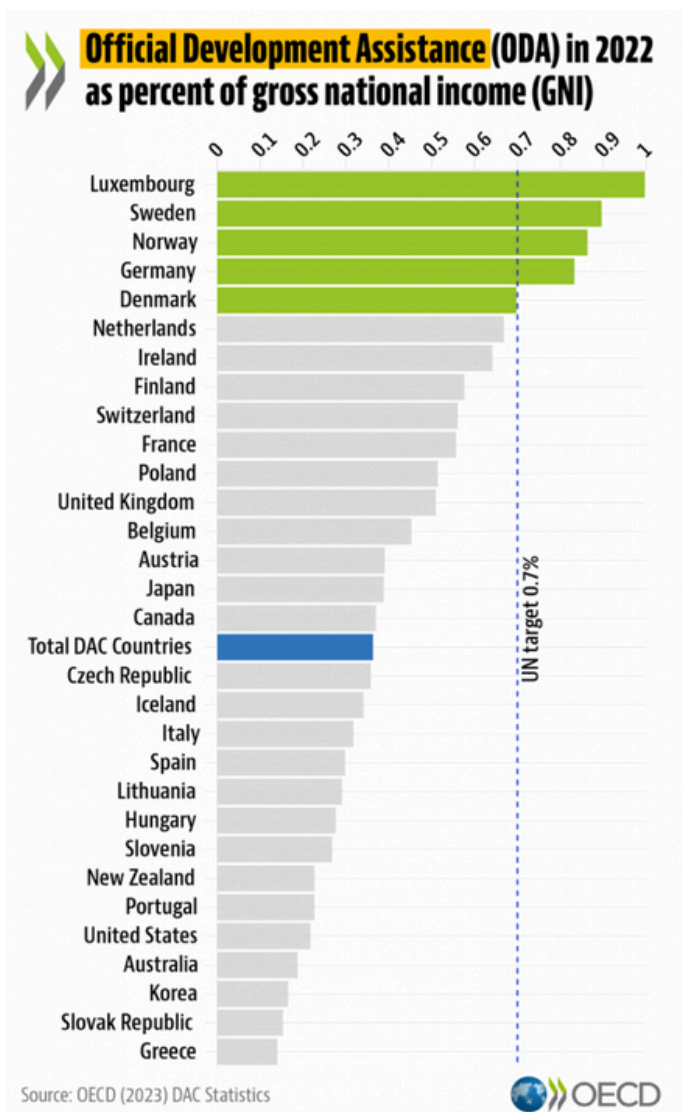


Image source: [OECD \(2023\) DAC Statistics](#)

This lack of trust is naturally fuelled by the disconnection between Australians and overseas markets, or knowledge gaps surrounding the local political, economic, or social dynamics of the overseas organisation.

Anita Toy, Chief Representative at Give2Asia, explains that as charities abroad don't necessarily meet the same reporting and disclosure requirements as Australian charities it can be harder for donors to trust or understand the efficacy of the charity. Amplifying this issue is the fact that many foundations or donors looking to give globally do not physically see or engage with work on-the-ground. The detrimental overemphasis in the media on negative cases of charity work also continues to diminish trust (Third Sector News, [2015](#)). When was the last time you saw the media actually spotlight an overseas charity's success?

However, there are many trustworthy organisations doing fantastic work internationally and it is important for donors to plug into networks like AIDN to find them. Tapping into giving networks is also pivotal for connecting with fellow like-minded funders or sharing vital information. For example, [Jasmine Social Investments](#) have an admirable track record in sharing their due diligence with others who want to make a real difference.

#2. Let's dispel the stubborn myths around global giving

Will my money make an impact?

Donors may also be worried about the impact of their donation or if it is being effectively measured. However, again, there are numerous resources available to evaluate the effectiveness of charities, such as [GiveWell](#) or the Australian market focused [ChangePath](#). These platforms independently assess charities using a range of data and further speak to the ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) obligations that regulated charities must adhere to in order to show impact and sustainability. These resources should empower donors to feel confident to give more.

How about governance and regulation?

Continuing perceptions that international charities are not appropriately governed, or money imprudently used, also persist. However, potential donors should be aware of the regulatory and compliance work underpinning and strengthening Australian charities operating abroad. The Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission ([ACNC](#)) maintains a searchable public [register](#) that provides a range of information including whether organisations are up to date with their reporting obligations, the names of the people managing a charity's governance, and their current sources of funding and size. These resources should enhance public trust, confidence, and awareness in the sector by giving prospective donors an understanding of a charity's accountability and purpose (Productivity Commission ToR [2023](#) p.21).

On top of this, over 130 Australian charities operating abroad are additionally members of the Australian Council for International Development ([ACFID](#)). All ACFID members are subject to the ACFID Code of Conduct which is recognised by the ACNC, is a prerequisite for Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funding and ensures that charities demonstrate transparent fundraising, operations and finances. Members are also subject to a regulated public complaint system. As Mark Purcell, CEO of ACFID, explains in reality this double regulation means that Australian charities operating overseas are arguably subject to more governance than their domestic counterparts. With two regulatory bodies derisking donations or investments – donors should feel confident in their ability to give and make a significant contribution to important causes abroad (The Compelling Case for Global Giving, [2022](#)).

For organisations that are not registered as an Australian charity, there are also giving platforms such as [Partners for Equity](#), [Give2Asia](#), [Global Development Group](#), [Action on Poverty](#) and more that carry out thorough due diligence. As Mark Cubit of Partners For Equity puts it, 'We saw the empty land, we saw the classroom construction, we see the teachers in the classrooms full of children and we read the safeguarding and financial audit reports. We can be as confident of our impact as with a project in Geelong or Brisbane'. AIDN has collated the [Pathways to Global Giving](#) into an eBooklet which links donors to the various organisations who have portfolios of overseas partners and includes extensive due diligence protocols.

#2. Let's dispel the stubborn myths around global giving

Can I benefit from tax deductibility when giving abroad?

Finally, the perception that global giving does not benefit from the same tax deductibility benefits as domestic giving continues to be a major barrier to global giving from Australians. Historically, international philanthropic giving in Australia was dominated by major players including World Vision and Save The Children. However, today we have a rich tapestry of smaller Australian run NGOs overseas, as well as many intermediaries that can give trusted access to NGOs run by non-Australians. This explosion of NGOs over the past decade was underpinned by The Hunger Project decision in 2014 that found that a fundraising organisation based in Australia could register as a public benevolent institution (PBI) and offer tax deductibility even though the implementation of their work was conducted by a separate entity offshore.

There are now a number of ways for Australian capital and income to meet needs ashore and ensure tax deductibility, from INGOs (that channel Australian funding to partner organisations and projects overseas such as Medicines Sans Frontières, World Vision and The Hunger Project), to single focus NGOs (Australian based PBIs that channel funding to a partner organisation such as The School of St Jude and Blue Dragon Children's Foundation), giving platforms (Give2Asia, Partners for Equity or the Life You Can Save), social enterprises (Thank You and Who Gives A Crap), to impact investing (such as Good Return and LendForGood).

After debunking these myths, will we see you on the global giving journey?



#3. How to start your impactful global giving journey.



Mark Cubit,
Co-Founder and
Director at AIDN



Emily Umbers,
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Hannah McNicol,
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1. Get to know an NGO or connect with other funders

Donors can have multiple and mixed motivations for giving and these can vary over time. A person’s motivations may be underpinned by a sense of morality and ethics. Or their sense of giving might be related to family or faith and religion (Becker and Murphy 2000). The amount people give may also reflect financial incentives, such as personal income tax. What we do know is that there will be a NGO, charity or development organisation out there that will align with your unique and diverse motivations. Importantly, most organisations will be happy to hear from or elucidate what they do to a similarly passionate individual or potential donor. If you’re feeling unsure about global giving, simply take a moment to learn more, connect with and be inspired by the organisations out there and their incredible operations.

Giving is a social process that both connects us to but is also impacted by the actions of our community. For example, Peter Singer explains that ‘one of the most significant factors in determining whether people give to charity is what others are doing’ (Singer, Guardian [2008](#)). Accordingly, we also encourage potential donors to tap into giving networks like AIDN. This will allow you to connect with like-minded funders or change-makers and realise you’re part of a wider giving community. In fact, funding networks are often willing to share their own experiences or due

#3. How to start your impactful global giving journey

diligence with other potential donors. For example, check out AIDN's [Pathways to Global Giving](#) which links donors to various organisations who have portfolios of overseas partners and includes extensive due diligence protocols.

2. Start with funding one international group and see how it goes

Part 2 of this series explained that there are a number of obstacles that continue to obstruct the healthy flow of giving to international causes from Australia. These obstacles include concerns surrounding impact and effectiveness, ensuring tax deductibility and a low awareness around Australia's charity regulatory environment. These concerns, whilst inflated, are stubborn and even sophisticated donors remain more timid when it comes to the global chapter of their giving portfolio. However, like with all good investments, start your global giving journey slowly. Fund one international group and...simply see how it goes!



This idea of 'dipping your toes in' and building confidence with a view to giving more in the future is already a blossoming trend in the (international) impact investing sector. Since inception [Red Hat Impact](#) has promoted the power of crowd equity. They allow syndicates of investors ranging from \$500 to \$75k to come together and support impact enterprises collectively. Similarly, organisations like [Kiva](#) are allowing sums as small as \$25 to be aggregated in a way that can create meaningful sums of money to microfinance institutions whilst simultaneously lowering the entry price for individuals to make initial impact investments.

3. Cultivate a trust-based relationship

As flagged in Part 2, trust also continues to hinder the level of outbound giving to international causes. For example, donors may be worried about how their donation is being used overseas. To temper this issue, Part 2 highlighted the numerous resources available to evaluate the effectiveness of charities, such as [ChangePath](#) or the Australian

Image: Taken in Kenya Photo Source: [Ian Macharia](#) on [Unsplash](#)

#3. How to start your impactful global giving journey

Charity and Not-for-Profit Commission's [charity register](#). However, what many may not realise is that fostering a sense of trust is also increasingly being shown to be vital to the inherent sustainability of charities themselves. Bottom-up approaches and 'trust-based philanthropy' allow charities to be creative, agile and to respond to the complex issues they are striving to challenge. Trust-based philanthropy often involves simpler reporting requirements or cutting back on grant restrictions (Rush, National Philanthropic Trust, [2022](#)). At the heart of trust-based philanthropy, however, is a commitment to rebalancing power, democratising decision-making and fostering processes of localisation. As Phil Buchanan, president of [The Center for Effective Philanthropy](#), explains it is 'those talented people in nonprofits working closest to communities who know best what is needed and how to do it' (Gamboa, [2023](#)).

4. Offer unrestricted funding and ask your grantees what the impact of untied grants are for them

Building on the above, the Center for Effective Philanthropy recently explored the impact of large, unrestricted grants on nonprofits over five years. In a context where the idea of such grants still feel 'risky' to many donors – they found that unrestricted 'funds created space for leaders to lead, built morale within the organisation and allowed for re-granting or other forms of collaboration across the broader field' (Fleming, Abril, Bradach for CEP, [2023](#)).

In sum, we encourage Australians looking to start their global giving journey to donate or invest with impact and trust, and allow these organisations the required flexibility to expand their programs, innovate and scale. It is amazing what these organisations are capable of when given the space to flourish.

5. Consider a trip to the field to see the work in action, if possible

Finally, an in-person trip to the organisation you want to support is a fantastic way to set the wheels in motion for a sustainable overseas giving agenda. Not only will it foster that intimate connection many donors seek to the cause they care about but donors will also undoubtedly meet a range of inspiring leaders and change-makers while they're there. When an in-person visit is not possible or appropriate, think creatively about how to enhance engagement – from zoom to seeking out other like minded funders to tuning into relevant podcasts such as AIDN's [philanthropod!](#)

Equipped with this key information, we are excited to meet more Australians on the global giving journey.

Mark Cubit is the Co-Founder of [AIDN](#) and sits on the Steering Committee. Mark has been active in the International giving space since 2005. In that time, foundations he has managed have funded over 200 NGOs in 38 countries. Mark's current responsibilities are with Partners For Equity, Cubit Family Foundation, Ripple Foundation, Planet Wheeler Foundation, Crap Foundation and he is Chair of The School of St Jude. Prior to his involvement in the philanthropic community, Mark was Managing Director, Australian Equities at Merrill Lynch Equities for 15 years.

#3. How to start your impactful global giving journey

Emily Umbers has over 15 years experience in marketing, communications and fundraising roles across the for-purpose space, including international development, education, welfare and disability.

In addition to her work at **AIDN**, she is the Portfolio Marketing & Development Manager at Partners for Equity where she works with a range of locally-led organisations across East Africa. Emily works closely with visionary leaders and their teams to hone their narrative, strengthen their brand and amplify their message. She has co-designed and co-delivers and an annual professional development program in Melbourne for early stage organisations working towards social cohesion and is on the funding committee for a brand new arts precinct in regional New South Wales. Emily has lived and worked in East Africa and travels there regularly. She holds a Bachelor of International Development and believes in the power of clear messaging, bold brands and developing meaningful relationships to create positive outcomes for the community.

Hannah McNicol is the Communications and Research Lead at **AIDN**. She is also a Cookson Scholar and International Development PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne and University of Manchester, and an affiliate of the Global Development Institute. After completing a Masters of Development Studies (specialising in gender theory), Hannah worked at Good Return (an Australian NFP focusing on women's economic empowerment across the Asia-Pacific) and the Australian Red Cross.



Image: black smartphone near person. Source: [HeadWay_on Unsplash](#)

#4. Achieving the SDGs means investing in MSMEs.



Cameron Neil,
Co-Founder and
Director of
LendForGood.

Guest author Cameron Neil, Co-Founder and Director of LendForGood, calls on those committed to international development and achieving the SDGs to look at investment opportunities in emerging markets - with a particular focus on the catalytic potential of MSMEs.

Over the last few months, two sobering statistics should have caught the attention of all working in the impact investing and international development sector.

1. There is a US\$4.2 trillion per year financing gap to achieve the SDGs in emerging markets
2. There is a US\$5.2 trillion per year financing gap for micro, small and medium sized businesses in emerging markets.

While not a perfect circle, the Venn diagram here has significant overlap – to achieve the SDGs we have to invest in micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs)

It is well understood that MSMEs are the lifeblood of any economy. The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) points out that MSMEs create jobs (7 out of 10 jobs in emerging markets), drive economic growth (40% of emerging market GDP) and innovation, and deliver vital goods and services in communities. The links to the SDGs here are clear, whether it be SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) or, of course, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

However, these SDGs are unachievable without fueling micro, small and medium business activity in emerging markets through catalytic and appropriate funding.

This clear synergy between MSMEs and the SDGs is not rocket science, novel or even new! Yet the financing gaps grow, the missing middle in impact finance persists, and the potential of MSMEs to deliver meaningful community development outcomes remains unrealised.

The UNCDF summarises the key barriers to addressing the ‘missing middle’ as:

- Transaction and due diligence costs
- Risk perception
- Investment readiness

#4. Achieving the SDGs means investing in MSMEs

On the surface, each of these barriers seem sensible and rational when it comes to deploying capital. The hesitancy of capital owners to invest in MSMEs is understandable if the primary outcome they are looking for is to maximise risk adjusted returns over the short to medium term.

For us at LendForGood, this underlying worldview, whereby investors are working with a narrow and short term view on risks, is at the heart of these barriers. Crucially, these barriers are also often compounded in an international development context: whereby investing in foreign markets can be perceived as adding a further layer of administration or risk to investors. While we believe it is also possible to address the barriers through capital innovation and use of new social and digital technologies (as we are doing), such initiatives need to be combined with a shift in mindset to prioritise impact outcomes and an understanding that in a highly interconnected world, local risks are global risks.



Image: Sarvaguna Foods & Kitchen In Nepal. Source: [LendForGood](#)

#4. Achieving the SDGs means investing in MSMEs

This brings us back to the point that achieving the SDGs means investing in MSMEs.

How might capital flow differently to MSMEs when our first analysis is on the potential contribution it may make to closing the SDG achievement gap and avoiding the downsides at a local and global level of missing these goals by a wide margin? How might such a perspective change the calculus of capital owners regarding transaction and due diligence costs, perceptions of risk, and the investment readiness of the MSME?

Asking – and answering – these critical questions is a core part of our mission at [LendForGood](#). Across 22 impact loans so far, we've presented the capital needs of MSMEs around the world in the context of the SDGs that they help to achieve. We've been able to mobilise AU\$1.55m from our expanding global community of individuals and organisations lending their support to unlock the potential of these enterprises.

Two examples that illustrate this clear opportunity include:

[Sarvaguna Foods & Kitchen](#) in Nepal borrowed AU\$90k on a 36 month term to fuel their mass catering business, providing over 75 direct local jobs already, feeding 1000s of school children nutritious meals, and purchasing more than 10,000 kgs of local produce from farmers – helping to achieve SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health & Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education).

[Tanwaste](#) in Tanzania has 3 impact loans totalling US\$100k on 24 month terms to provide some of the first formal waste collection and management services in urban Tanzania. They are creating meaningful, safe and secure jobs (compared to the informal and dangerous livelihoods traditionally on offer from waste scavenging), providing cleaner urban environments and improved community health outcomes. Tanwaste's business delivers on many SDGs, including 1 (No Poverty), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).



Image: Tanwaste in Tanzania. Source: [LendForGood](#)

#4. Achieving the SDGs means investing in MSMEs

Investing in MSMEs can be transformative, creating value far beyond risk adjusted returns for capital owners.

For those of us committed to international development and achieving the SDGs, investing in MSMEs is a powerful tool.

However, to close the trillion dollar investment gaps that persist, we need to collaborate, innovate and catalyse a shift in mindsets that puts our shared humanity and a livable planet as the primary purpose of capital.

Cameron Neil is co-founder and Director of LendForGood.

He lives in Naarm and works globally on capital innovation for the next economy.

LendForGood is a joint venture between the teams at Red Hat Impact and StartSomeGood. LendForGood enables anyone to easily lend capital to support enterprises that solve social and environmental challenges. Every deal is endorsed by our vetted partners. Between them, they have decades of experience working with impact enterprises around the world, and understand their challenge in accessing capital at the right time, on the right terms, to fuel their growth and meet business needs. They also share a belief in, and commitment to, the power of the crowd and community and that democratising participation in impact investment is necessary to create lasting community wealth.

#5. Disasters are on the rise. But how can donors give effectively?



Anita Toy
Inaugural Executive
Director
of Myriad Australia
(formerly Give2Asia
Australia)

Guest author Anita Toy, formerly Chief Representative of Give2Asia Australia, highlights the increasing need for philanthropic funding from Australian markets for disaster preparedness, resilience and awareness in our region. However, with new philanthropic funding mechanisms for disaster relief quickly emerging, like DisasterLink, Australian donors should feel empowered to give and disavow common misconceptions about international giving.

The Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing region in the world – and the most disaster-prone. A person in Asia is five times more likely to experience a natural disaster than the average person on earth. Earthquakes, tsunamis, tropical storms, floods and landslides are an annual occurrence in this region, and the frequency of climate-related disasters is increasing. In 2022, the region had over 140 disasters resulting in over 7,500 deaths.

It is vulnerable communities that are among the hardest hit, creating deeper inequalities that can be transmitted over generations. Not only are disasters slowing down poverty reduction, without appropriate disaster response at the local level, extreme poverty is projected to double to 123 million.

In this context, it is clear that philanthropic giving, ODA and development finance will need to play a critical role in disaster preparedness, resilience and awareness. However, for many Australian donors navigating the disaster funding ecosystem can still seem overwhelming. It is clear that stubborn and inflated barriers continue to undermine Australia's appetite for international giving in the case of disaster funding and more broadly. For example, as charities abroad don't necessarily meet the same reporting and disclosure requirements as Australian charities it can be harder for donors to trust or understand the efficacy of the charity.

This lack of trust is naturally fueled by the disconnection between Australians and overseas markets, or knowledge gaps surrounding the local political, economic, or social dynamics of the overseas organisation. Donors may also be worried about if their donation is being effectively measured or if it is reaching those most impacted by the disasters on-the-ground.

However, philanthropic funding mechanisms for disaster relief are evolving and Australians should feel more comfortable giving when it is needed, to those who need it most.

#5. Disasters are on the rise. But how can donors give effectively?

For example, Australian donors can fund international disaster relief, response and recovery efforts more effectively through a new Disaster Network launched by [Give2Asia](#). [DisasterLink](#) is a network of pre-positioned partners in countries at high risk of disasters. Each pre-positioned member is highly invested in the areas they serve, enabling them to help their local communities rebuild and recover long after the immediate crisis is over. It fills a critical gap for donors and local responders when a disaster strikes.

Launched in 2022 with 20 locally-led partners across Bangladesh, India, Japan, Nepal and the Philippines, DisasterLink recently [expanded](#) to cover 15 new locations, including Australia, and extended support to 51 partners. This Network responds to some of the findings from the [Trends in Disaster Philanthropy to the Asia-Pacific report](#), which found that supporting community-based work yields the highest return on investment and that international funding to larger international NGOs – rarely trickles down to the local level where communities need it most.

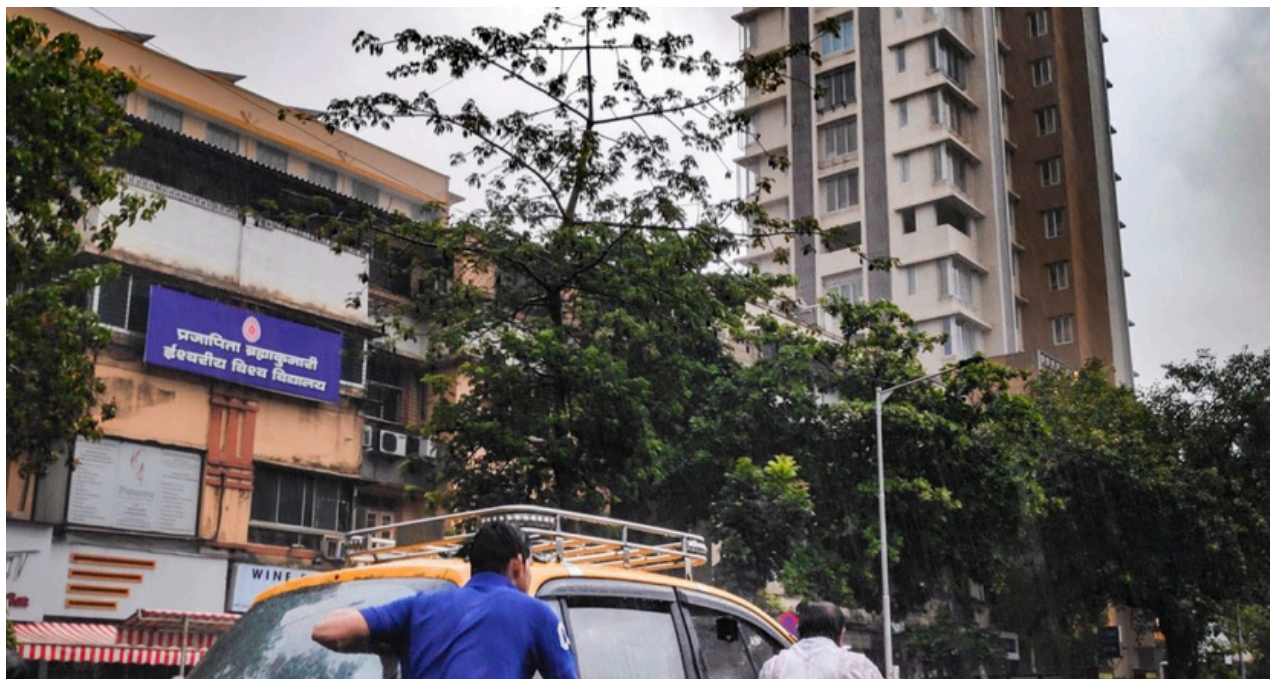
DisasterLink seeks to help Australian donors overcome the impulse to give sporadically when a disaster strikes and to give effectively and strategically. The Network enables donors to make the greatest impact during the most critical time.

Further to DisasterLink, there is the [Emergency Action Alliance](#) made up of 15 Australian INGOs responding to international crises and the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) who provide resources to U.S donors seeking to support local partners in their disaster resilience efforts.



Image: Group of wooden houses with red boat in water. Source: [Jamison Cameron](#) on Unsplash

#5. Disasters are on the rise. But how can donors give effectively?



Disasters are on the rise in Asia. Credit: [iStock](#).

Anita Toy is the inaugural Executive Director of Myriad Australia, a DGR1 organisation enabling Australian donors to support charitable projects across the world. Anita has over 14 years' experience in corporate, private and international philanthropy. Prior to joining Myriad Australia, Anita worked for the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group for 14 years where she managed the organisation's community investment program across 32 countries and strategically partnered with charitable organisations to achieve social impact.

Myriad Australia (formerly Give2Asia Australia) is a founding member of the global network for philanthropy – Myriad, an Alliance dedicated to supporting cross-border philanthropy. In 2023, Myriad members collectively granted US\$314 million to charitable programmes in 113 countries and across a variety of topics including education, the arts, disaster response, health services, climate change, and much more.

#6. DFAT's new disability equity and rights strategy: An opportunity to shift the dial.



Jane Edge
CEO of CBM Australia

Guest author Jane Edge, CEO of CBM Australia, highlights the upcoming opportunity for Australia's "Disability Equity and Rights Strategy" to be ambitious, accountable and resourced.

One in every six people on the planet lives with a disability. Eighty percent of people with disabilities live in developing countries, so that means at least 700 million are our neighbours here in the Indo-Pacific region.

People with disabilities are among the poorest and most marginalised across all communities. The World Bank estimates that 20 percent of the world's poorest people live with disability. As a result, they are often the people who feel the effects of adversity most harshly and are least likely to be included and supported in any setting from health care to education to livelihoods.

Despite this, at the halfway mark, people with disabilities are the group left furthest behind in progress made so far toward Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as 'a catastrophic global failure to protect the rights of persons with disabilities'. The growing climate crisis and ongoing economic upheaval will further compound this failure and its very real impacts on the lives of people with disabilities in our region and beyond.

Australia has been a global leader in disability inclusive development for more than a decade. Our leadership has supported people with disabilities to be included in society and development efforts directly. It's also resulted in many other countries and development actors improving their own approach to disability inclusive development.

However, Australia's leadership in this space has been hollowing out over recent years with gaps in implementation from strategy to program level and stagnant funding.

In 2021-22, just 2.5 per cent of Australia's official development assistance was attributable as disability inclusive. The central disability allocation within the aid budget has languished at \$12.9M since at least 2014-15. It was briefly cut to \$9.6m in 2021-22 before being restored to \$12.9m in the October 2022 budget. Welcome as that restoration may be, the allocation has lost more than \$5M in real-term value since 2014-15.

#6. DFAT's new disability equity and rights strategy: An opportunity to shift the dial

Colleagues in the disability movement have reflected that, while Australia's intentions on disability inclusive development are good, there is not enough resourcing to translate these commitments into sustained, on-the-ground impact.

The disability movement, with strong leadership from the Pacific, is driving a shift in language from 'disability inclusion' toward 'disability equity'. 'Disability inclusion' in development is where development programs are designed to include people living with disabilities. Whereas 'disability equity' is the process of ensuring that people with disabilities are able to fully engage, participate and lead on an equal basis with others from the outset. This shift has risen from a fundamental questioning of whether the efforts on inclusion over the last decade and more have led to systematic, meaningful participation and realisation of rights for people with disabilities. And the answer, devastatingly, is that they have not. In this context, the disability movement is clear that the focus needs to be on the goal – disability equity – and not one part of the process towards that goal – disability inclusion.

As the needs of people with disabilities increase, and the move toward equity over tick box inclusion grows, we must go beyond commitments and pockets of good practice to unlock the potential of the world's largest minority. We must resource ambitious approaches in line with the disability movement's priorities that will result in significant and lasting change in the lives of people with disabilities.



Image: Suprihatin (middle) runs a self-help group for people with psychosocial disabilities in Indonesia, they are waving to the camera. Source: CBM Australia 2023.

#6. DFAT's new disability equity and rights strategy: An opportunity to shift the dial

The Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will imminently embark on the development of the third strategy to guide disability in Australia's development program. It is encouraging that this strategy will be called the 'Disability Equity and Rights Strategy'.

The name for the new strategy signals that the government has listened to the shift taking place in the disability movement. The strategy provides an important opportunity for Australia to boost its ambition and delivery toward disability equity across development efforts.

The Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC) together with the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is calling for the new Disability Equity and Rights strategy to be:

Ambitious: Set a 2030 target of 10 per cent of ODA being allocated to initiatives with disability equity as a principal objective, according to the OECD Development Assistance Committee Disability policy marker.

Accountable: Require that all in-country programs over \$3m have a disability objective, and that 80 per cent of programs effectively address disability equity.

Resourced: Increase the central disability allocation to \$20m per annum with annual increases thereafter in line with overall budget increases.

CBM Australia supports this call.

The ADDC is a membership organisation that is free to join for both organisations and individuals. I encourage AIDN members to consider becoming a member.



Image: Isireli from Tailevu South Disability Organisation is a powerful disability advocate within his community. Source: CBM Australia 2023

ADDC and ACFID are coordinating groups across the Australian development sector to collaborate and support submissions. I also encourage AIDN members to look out for the consultation when it formally launches in the coming weeks and consider making their own submissions.

#6. DFAT's new disability equity and rights strategy: An opportunity to shift the dial

In the face of the needs of people with disabilities in developing countries in our region; in light of the escalating climate crisis and the impact it's already having; and in response to the clear calls of the disability movement, there has never been a more important time for Australia to step up our efforts and help shift the dial on disability equity and rights.

Jane Edge draws on over 25 years' experience in high impact roles focused on social change and sustainable development. Jane has held the position of Chief Executive of CBM since July 2015 following three years as Chief Operating Officer. As CEO, Jane exemplifies a passion for making a lasting, positive difference by enabling others to be agents of change.

CBM Australia is part of a Christian international development organisation devoted to improving the lives of people with disabilities in the poorest places on earth. Poverty and disability go hand in hand, creating a cycle of inequality, isolation and exclusion that leads to the most extreme forms of poverty. Throughout their 115-year history and over 45 years in Australia, they have developed proven community-based programs that help millions of people benefit from real, lasting change.

#7. Major innovation in disaster relief rebuilding is underway and helping to improve access to education. However, challenges persist in maximising impact.



Tanya Armstrong
CEO of Classroom
of Hope

Guest author Tanya Armstrong, CEO of Classroom of Hope, highlights how major innovation in disaster relief rebuilding is underway. With a focus on innovative "block technology", sustainable and disaster proof schools are being built and thus improving access to education. However, challenges persist in maximising the impact of this pioneering technology.

Indonesia's archipelago provinces are particularly vulnerable to earthquakes. These earthquakes are not only a threat to the lives of the communities in the region, disastrous for basic infrastructure and social services but can also have a devastating impact on access to education for Indonesia's children. This is because the majority of school buildings are not earthquake-resistant.

The consequences of poor safety standards in school buildings were highlighted last November when the mountainous region of Cianjur in West Java, Indonesia, was rocked by a shallow quake that resulted in the collapse of more than 50 schools. Tragically, according to [Save the Children](#), many of the 260 fatalities were children who had been at school when the tremors hit at 1pm.

Despite repeated incidents such as this, efforts to rebuild schools continue to default to the same low-cost bricks and mortar structures as before. Indeed, when [Classroom of Hope Australia](#) started as an education charity in Southeast Asia – we too used conventional building materials to build our schools.

However, things are changing.

In 2018, the Indonesian island of Lombok was rocked by a series of strong earthquakes that severely impacted educational facilities and social services. More than 400 schools were destroyed in the northern part of the island, affecting some 50,000 children. Classroom of Hope initially provided 23 pop-up schools as a temporary solution, but even years after the disaster, thousands of children on the island of Lombok are still out of school. Traumatized families have expressed that they are too scared to send their children back into conventional brick and mortar buildings.

#7. Major innovation in disaster relief rebuilding is underway and helping to improve access to education. However, challenges persist in maximising impact.

It was at this moment that our founder, Duncan Ward, realised there is an urgent need for more innovation in disaster relief rebuilding. We quickly began researching alternative earthquake resistant technologies with an emphasis on sustainability and durability.

This led Classroom of Hope to a Finnish company, Block Solutions OY, which had already invented sustainable shelter technology using recycled plastics in response to a request from the United Nations. The lightweight block modules look like honeycomb and slot together like Lego which enables whole buildings to be constructed in a couple of days.

The prototype block modules were rigorously tested in the first Block Solutions factory in Jakarta before the Lombok government agreed to work with Classroom of Hope on a major disaster relief programme, with a goal of building 200 schools within five years. Construction of the first Block Schools began in June 2021 in the village of Taman Sari, and since then the collaboration has built 18 schools with 52 classrooms.



Image: One of Classroom of Hope's block schools. Source: Classroom of Hope

Feedback from the communities on the Block Schools has been resoundingly positive. Community members have said they feel safer in these buildings, which are designed to cause minimum damage in the event of collapse. They are also reported to be cooler and, therefore, more comfortable as the blocks have thermal-resistance properties and are expected to last for 100 years.

The block modules also provide a circular economy approach to dealing with plastic waste – Indonesia is second only to China as the world's largest contributor to plastic pollution, generating roughly 24,500 tonnes per day. Two thirds of this waste is unsorted, making it difficult to recycle and causing plastic waste to end up in landfills or leak into the ocean. Each Block School classroom removes approximately 1.8 tonnes of plastic waste from the environment, and the average classroom requires 700 blocks.

#7. Major innovation in disaster relief rebuilding is underway and helping to improve access to education. However, challenges persist in maximising impact.

We further connected with local actors and other NGOs, such as [Sungai Watch](#) that creates solutions to preventing waste entering rivers and raising community awareness, to ensure that we were centering a localised approach and tapping into the incredible local sustainability movement. We found that working with NGO, [Happy Hearts Indonesia](#), was also critical because of their local knowledge, insights and established on-the-ground relationships. Excitingly, this partnership will facilitate Block Schools on the neighbouring island of Sumba in 2024.

However, despite the success of this technology there are continued challenges to further addressing and expanding this pioneering disaster relief rebuilding program.



Image/source: Classroom of Hope 2023

First, whilst this technology is cost competitive in the context of building schools (because of the shared wall between classrooms), overall this technology is 25% more costly for housing than using conventional materials. This is because the recycled plastic supply chain continues to fluctuate.

The fact that virgin plastics are cheaper than recycled is a global issue that needs to be resolved. In Indonesia specifically, project costs could be reduced if the government introduced policies to regulate and subsidise waste collection. Likewise, if recycling infrastructure is developed locally, then the recycled plastic would not have to be externally sourced.

#7. Major innovation in disaster relief rebuilding is underway and helping to improve access to education. However, challenges persist in maximising impact.

Second, taking the risk of being an early adopter of innovative technology also creates the need for catalytic philanthropy that can overcome a fear of the new. In our experience of seeking major donors, there is a lot of focus on the ‘what ifs’. In particular – what could go wrong. We believe that this risk aversion has hampered disaster relief rebuilding and explains why disaster relief rebuilding programs stick with the status quo. That is, rather than delivering long-term sustainable solutions that can stand up to future earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Moving forward, our advice to other NGOs seeking to find innovative and sustainable solutions is: the solutions are out there, do the research and due diligence and be bold in bringing it to life. In fact, make sustainability a part of the fabric of the organisation.

Tanya Armstrong has over 15 years experience as an executive leader in social housing and homelessness services NGOs in Australia and has a strong track record working with CEOs and Boards to develop and implement strategic and operational plans that deliver on the mission. Tanya is known for her ability to deliver high-quality outcomes for the benefit of disadvantaged communities and has a long history of being involved in purposeful work. Tanya firmly believes everyone should have access to a home and equal access to education. Six months after joining Classroom of Hope as International Program Director, Tanya was the natural choice to step in to lead the company in April 2023.

Classroom of Hope is an education nonprofit organisation. They partner with local NGO’s and communities to build safe and sustainable block schools and block homes out of recycled plastic waste in developing countries. They innovate using new block technology to ensure they are being sustainable in their approach to development by using the circular economy. In 2021 they built the world’s first block school in a matter of 6 days and the worlds first block toilet in 2023 in Indonesia.

#8. Responsible financial inclusion is key to protecting vulnerable clients in the Asia-Pacific region.



Shane Nichols
CEO of Good Return

In light of recent investigations into the microfinance sector in Cambodia, guest author Shane Nichols, CEO of Good Return, calls for responsible and appropriate financial inclusion practices and principles to protect vulnerable clients in the Asia-Pacific region.

Just last week I listened with interest as a group of young Cambodian women garment factory workers, living in an urban slum, explained how they were learning to use mobile phone banking to receive their wages and manage their money. For these women, mobile banking was more convenient and safer than being paid in cash. Step by step they are becoming empowered users of financial services: participating in the digital economy and the many opportunities it presents. I was struck by how rapidly things had evolved in Cambodia in recent years.

However, the story of financial inclusion in Cambodia, and in many other of Australia's low-income neighbours, has not been without its challenges. In both Cambodia and the broader Asia-Pacific region, marginalised and vulnerable communities, particularly women and people with disabilities, continue to face barriers to accessing formal finance. Many of us working in financial inclusion were also deeply concerned to read the [recent article in the Guardian](#) that detailed how Cambodian families have suffered as a result of over-indebtedness, in some cases caused by irresponsible lending practices. The report covers cases brought to light by Cambodian human rights organisation [Licadho](#), in which borrowers had taken on loans far beyond their means and were allegedly being threatened to make repayments. The article suggests that these threats have led to forced property sales and in some cases, tragically, loss of life due to suicide.

These allegations need to be taken very seriously and, indeed, the [International Finance Corporation](#) is currently investigating six microfinance firms in Cambodia. Their investigation has been urged by [Licadho](#) and [Equitable Cambodia](#), who claim to have evidence of borrowers who have been victims of “predatory”, “deceptive” and “irresponsible” loans and collection tactics. The six microlenders receive direct or indirect IFC funding and comprise about 75% of Cambodia's microfinance market.

As these investigations continue, the development and financial sectors, both within Cambodia and internationally, must respond openly and honestly, and remain focused on the rights and interests of their clients. Financial inclusion remains a key tool for enabling low-income communities to access sustainable and safe financial services, and has become particularly important in the post-COVID era – which has seen [an increase in poverty rates in Cambodia](#) and a troubled global economy. However, questions need to be answered, learnings shared and recommendations acted on.

#8. Responsible financial inclusion is key to protecting vulnerable clients in the Asia-Pacific region

In Cambodia, bringing all excluded groups into the economy must remain a priority to reduce inequality, grow economies and protect families into the future. I was pleased to see the commitment of a diverse range of sector actors tackling these issues, with the ultimate goal of sustainable and positive outcomes for their clients, at the recent Cambodian annual microfinance conference in Phnom Penh.

Political leadership is also crucial and the Cambodian government is one of many governments in the region with a robust financial inclusion strategy. Their National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2019-2025 has a focus on working with the finance sector to drive economic activity and small business growth, and supports a range of activities to boost financial literacy and consumer awareness across the most

vulnerable parts of the population. The recently released Financial Technology Development Policy 2023-2028 further builds inclusion by promoting digital innovation to achieve financial inclusion. Given the number of mobile broadband internet subscribers in Cambodia has surpassed the country's 16 million population level, the new policy recognises the power of digital financial products in helping more entrepreneurs and families access financial services.

However, it is further critical that these reports and findings into microfinance within Cambodia also strengthen the sector's broader mission of enhancing responsible financial inclusion for all internationally. Like any service, financial services can be delivered well. But they can also be delivered poorly. Responsible financial services should follow international standards regarding appropriate product design, prevention of overindebtedness, transparency, responsible pricing, fair and respectful treatment of clients, protection of client data, mechanisms for complaint resolution, and good governance and HR practices.



Image: Market seller in Siem Reap. Source: [Chetan Hireholi on Unsplash](#).

#8. Responsible financial inclusion is key to protecting vulnerable clients in the Asia-Pacific region

The international development and financial sectors must work together to create transformative products and services to meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalised clients in the Asia-Pacific region.

Using social inclusion principles driven by development experts, finance sector staff can be trained to gain a deep understanding of gender issues and the barriers facing people with lower incomes. Together, financial service providers and not-for-profits can develop financial capability training programs to build the confidence and knowledge of potential clients, including their rights and responsibilities as consumers, and dangers to look out for.



Image: Meeting a microfinance client in Cambodia. Credit: Good Return 2023.

An example of this is the National Bank of Cambodia's Let's Talk Money campaign, delivered in partnership with Good Return. The campaign focuses on growing money skills, awareness and confidence, with targeted sessions for women garment factory workers, and uses a powerful video drama series about a young couple moving from the country to the city to build their future. After successfully reaching millions of Cambodians, the next phase of the campaign will use a comic book series for women that focuses on how to access and use safe, digital financial products.

Models of effective financial inclusion will continue to evolve, but the combination of access to finance and financial and business skills will continue to be a powerful means of achieving economic participation and improvements in living standards. The recent report on microfinance by 60 Decibels found that clients who access additional and complementary services to credit from their financial service provider have more substantial improvements in quality of life, business income, ability to manage finances, savings, and confidence compared to those who do not.

#8. Responsible financial inclusion is key to protecting vulnerable clients in the Asia-Pacific region

Ultimately, the recent Guardian article, reports and IFC investigation are timely, and appropriately spotlight the rights of vulnerable clients, highlight irresponsible actions, and hold those responsible to account. The tragic reports of families affected by irresponsible actions should only strengthen the resolve of governments, development agencies and responsible financial institutions to deliver a model of financial inclusion with clients' interests at the centre – clients such as the young women workers I recently had the privilege of learning from. Only when this is done, will the sector be able to design inclusive services that contribute to the financial health and well being of families and communities, and to the stability and prosperity of our region.

Shane Nichols' experience in inclusive finance and enterprise development spans two decades, having worked with multiple financial service providers and social enterprises across Asia and the Pacific. Before joining Good Return, Shane worked for DFAT on economic development programs in China and Mongolia. Shane serves as a non-executive director of ACFID, our sector peak body.

Good Return is a social purpose organisation working across the Asia Pacific region to enable women and their families to access opportunity and build financial security. Their focus is enabling the provision of responsible finance to local entrepreneurs, as well as education and business training to women and other excluded groups to build confidence and financial capability.

#9. To tackle the biggest challenges of our time it will be critical to leverage both global and local networks and resources.



Biheng Zhang
General Manager
of The Intrepid
Foundation

Guest author Biheng Zhang, General Manager of The Intrepid Foundation, reflects on the recent earthquake in Morocco, and argues that to tackle the biggest challenges of our time we will need robust networks that leverage global capabilities and resources, alongside critical on-the-ground, local knowledge and action. We will also need to turn to the power of human connection in the face of crises.

Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, Morocco and Afghanistan, floods in Libya, global conflict and humanitarian crises at a scale that defies words. For many, 2023 has left us feeling helpless, wondering what we can realistically do amidst unimaginable devastation and loss. Moreover, with the impacts of climate change mounting, these crises will only continue to rise.

However, at [Intrepid Travel](#), we've quickly learnt that to tackle the biggest challenges of our time we will need robust networks that leverage global capabilities and resources, alongside critical on-the-ground, local knowledge and action. We've also learnt to turn to the power of human connection in the face of crises.

As a global travel business operating in over 100 countries, not a month goes by where Intrepid Travel isn't directly responding to and managing a major event. From civil unrest to natural disasters, our teams are used to thinking on their feet to find solutions that keep our customers and teams safe, that protect our travellers' once-in-a-lifetime experience, and maintain our ability to operate a sustainable business.

When a magnitude 6.8 earthquake hit Morocco on 8 September 2023, the most deadly quake in more than six decades for the country, we knew immediately this would require a major operational response. Morocco is one of Intrepid's most popular destinations and at the time of the earthquake we had more than 600 customers, plus more than 90 team members, on the ground.

The first hours after a disaster are critical. Our teams needed to account for everyone on a trip to ensure their safety. They're diverting itineraries and finding alternative accommodation not only for those 600 on the ground but the hundreds of booked travellers due to arrive in the coming days. They're fielding calls from concerned loved ones back home. For our Moroccan team members, they were also juggling concerns and responsibilities for their own families and wider communities.

#9. To tackle the biggest challenges of our time it will be critical to leverage both global and local networks and resources

At this stage, our Marrakech team also quickly made contact with two of the Intrepid Foundation's local partners in Morocco: Education for All and High Atlas Foundation. And this earthquake, as we quickly learnt, had hit their core. Education for All provides education to girls living in remote villages in the High Atlas region, an area where it is estimated 80% of girls are illiterate. Located in some of the worst affected parts of Morocco, all six of their boarding houses sustained damages. Devastatingly, they had lost a student in the earthquake. The High Atlas Foundation, which focuses on sustainable agricultural practices for Muslim farming communities and women, was likewise impacted by the earthquake.

However, it was also at this moment where the Intrepid team witnessed the incredible capability, resourcefulness and flexibility that local organisations can leverage in times of crises.

High Atlas Foundation's distinctive community-led development model pivoted overnight to community-led rebuilding and recovery. Operating in the epicentre of the earthquake, they leaned on their strength in connecting with remote villages to be among the first responders providing water, tents and warm clothing to survivors in some of the toughest to reach parts of this mountainous region. Education for All also offered relief grants and free counselling to those affected in their community, as well as finding alternative accommodation to enable girls to return to education as quickly as possible.

It was also at this moment that we simultaneously witnessed the incredible impact that a robust combination of global and local networks can have when mobilised together. We quickly learnt from our staff on the ground that – and this speaks volumes about Intrepid's customers and the broader community – within hours of the news breaking they were repeatedly fielding the same question from partners and relatives abroad: "How can I help?"



Image: Market in Marrakech. Source/credit: [Alex Azabache on Unsplash](#)

#9. To tackle the biggest challenges of our time it will be critical to leverage both global and local networks and resources

Knowing that we must respond immediately, and with the infrastructure of a global business behind us, in just over 24 hours after the earthquake struck we were able to launch an emergency fundraising appeal for High Atlas Foundation and Education for All, directing much needed financial resources to the worst hit regions of Morocco.

The support we witnessed from Intrepid's global network of customers, suppliers, staff, industry collaborators and competitors was extraordinary. [The Conscious Travel Foundation](#) held a travel industry event in London asking the sector to consider how they can be helpful in a crisis and raising money for the appeal. Luxury Hotels of the World donated US\$25,000 and matched all staff donations. [Flight Centre](#), [Canva Foundation](#), [Luxury Escapes](#) and [Topdeck Travel](#) all stepped in with generous financial support. In just two months we have collectively raised AU\$650,000 towards community-led recovery efforts in the High Atlas region.

Ultimately, this experience has opened our eyes to how we can be helpful – as a foundation, a business and a sector. Education for All and High Atlas Foundation have longstanding relationships with our Morocco team – identified by our local staff for their leadership and impact. And this couldn't have been more evident in the face of crises. Our local teams and knowledge allowed our donors to be the first responders, despite the Moroccan government restricting foreign aid from most jurisdictions and international NGOs.

And it is also this local connection that was necessary to give travellers the confidence to travel again. Within days it was clear that Morocco was a safe destination; the earthquake had mainly affected two areas – parts of the Marrakech medina and the High Atlas region – but many other parts of the vast and beautiful country were unaffected. Critically, it was our local team giving a voice to the small family businesses, reminding us all that the people of Morocco depended on tourism for their livelihoods.

There is no question that in times of crisis humans want to help one another. In these moments there is no competition. We watched the global travel sector come together.

After all, isn't that what travel is all about – to inspire us to look beyond differences and seek out connection and community?

Biheng Zhang is the General Manager of The Intrepid Foundation, the not-for-profit arm of Intrepid Travel. Experienced in fundraising and philanthropy, she is passionate about tackling social inequality through a global lens. A keen traveller, Biheng has seen first-hand the power of travel to inspire change for a better future.

The Intrepid Foundation was established in 2002 and empowers travellers to make real impact in the communities they visit. With Intrepid's local knowledge and teams on the ground, they support carefully chosen partners to make a positive impact and create solutions on important issues. This ensures that our travellers' donations aren't just about giving back but giving responsibly – impactfully – where it's really needed.

#10. Field catalysts: driving large-scale change through radical collaboration.



Dr. Madeleine Ballard
CEO of Community
Health
Impact Coalition
(CHIC)

Dr. Madeleine Ballard, CEO of Community Health Impact Coalition, highlights the pivotal role of "field catalysts" for aligning diverse stakeholders towards achieving large-scale systematic change. Dr. Ballard first underscores the need for field catalysts and demonstrates how they operate in practice. Dr. Ballard then finishes by discussing potential replication of this approach and important considerations for funders.

In the realm of large-scale social change, field catalysts have emerged as a powerful force. Field catalysts, commonly known as coalitions or multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), play a pivotal role in aligning diverse stakeholders towards achieving large-scale systematic change. But what exactly makes field catalysts effective, and how can other changemakers in the development sector adopt similar strategies to catalyze change in their own spheres? Let's delve into the why, how, and the potential for replication of this approach.

Why field catalysts?

The complexity of global challenges underscores the need for change on a scale commensurate with their magnitude. Solving these problems requires changing complex systems and doing so on a scale that no single entity can achieve alone. Put simply, it requires collective action.

Field catalysts step into this space, leveraging collective resources and expertise to amplify impact. Field catalysts: (i) shape the actions of others, instead of engaging in direct action themselves; (ii) orchestrate collaboration to drive systemic change, rather than scaling up individual organizations; and (iii) prioritize winning over longevity, operating primarily behind the scenes.

This stands in stark contrast to the usual approach whereby aid and development organizations are incentivized to emphasize their own growth and promote their own brands. In practice, this means that traditional development organisations frequently view each other as competitors rather than collaborators, prioritizing organizational interests over collective goals. This approach can hinder progress towards achieving systems change.

That's why, when setting up Community Health Impact Coalition (CHIC), we resolved to do things differently. Not just with medical innovation, but with radical collaboration *by design*.

#10. Field catalysts: driving large-scale change through radical collaboration

A field catalyst in action

Let's begin with an example of how a field catalyst operates in practice. Millions of community health workers (CHWs) globally—70% women—are not salaried, skilled, supervised, and supplied. CHIC is making professional community health workers the norm worldwide by changing guidelines, funding, and policy. We research to equip international norm setters with evidence. We advocate to influence global financing institutions. And we activate in-country CHW networks to win national policy. Our vision is quality care for all, including those who provide it.

CHIC comprises thousands of CHWs and dozens of aligned global health organizations in 60+ countries. And we're wielding influence on a scale sufficient to change global norms. Our research has been viewed over 150,000 times and is regularly cited in major policy documents. We've set up the largest-ever fund for national proCHW programs and successfully lobbied major funders to invest in line with international guidance. We can now celebrate thirty-six countries who salary and nationally accredit CHWs.

Sustained cooperation and collaboration are the essences of how we fight together. Together our voices are stronger, our resources go further. And we can do more for patients.

It's a powerful machine: a shared vision of health for all, without caring who gets the credit.



Image: Community Health Workers (CHWs) in Kenya. Source/credit: CHIC

#10. Field catalysts: driving large-scale change through radical collaboration

Considerations for funders

However, despite the clear potential of this model, at present, most field catalysts fail.

Inadequate stakeholder engagement, launching with fanfare but lacking clear plans or support, and wavering commitment from members over time continue to pose significant challenges for field catalysts. Conversely, successful field catalysts typically emerge from fields with critical mass and receive support from core funders and leaders. To navigate these challenges effectively, funders can play a crucial role in supporting field catalysts including:



Image: CHIC vaccine line. Source/credit: CHIC

Support the pre-work

Research has found that successful field catalysts prioritize a “long tail” of informal collaboration—18 months on average—prior to launch. Regular meetings over months or years, ideally facilitated by a neutral party, require a modest yet indispensable financial investment.

Invest in thorough groundwork, including inclusive consultations and alignment of objectives before formal launch. Premature launches not only waste resources but lead to initiative fatigue. Investing in a part-time facilitator to establish consensus on a problem’s definition and scope, and balancing broad relevance with actionable impact can also yield returns surpassing that of any other investment in the initiation, design, and launch phases.

#10. Field catalysts: driving large-scale change through radical collaboration

Rule out common pitfalls

Field catalysts depend heavily on collaboration that is typically not incentivized a priori and could even be actively disincentivized. Therefore, perhaps even more so than for other ventures, strategic planning and meticulous execution are critical to set up field catalysts for success.

As a funder, when selecting candidates to support, prioritize those who employ research-based practices to increase the likelihood of success. Seek evidence of thorough groundwork before formal launch, aimed at aligning stakeholders and securing support from key players. Evaluate the extent to which trust is cultivated among members, a clear mission and value proposition are established, and operational structures are defined. Assess if the group has identified key levers for driving systemic change within the target ecosystem, focusing efforts on areas where it can wield maximum influence. Determine if the group can track progress. Inquire into hosting arrangements: those that involve neutral convenors, who offer administrative support while maintaining impartiality, are crucial for building legitimacy and engagement.

Fund as a round

A clear finding from the research is that higher-performing MSIs tend to have more donors at launch compared to their lower-performing counterparts. Support from multiple smaller donors not only dispels the perception that the initiative is merely an extension of a single donor's programs but also generates momentum and critical mass. This attracts additional contributors and ensures that the coalition is resourced to establish staffing, governance, and capabilities for success.

Providing multi-year, unrestricted funding structured as a seed round with other like-minded donors allows for experimentation, development, and the demonstration of initial proof points, while fostering shared accountability.



Source/credit: CHIC

#10. Field catalysts: driving large-scale change through radical collaboration

Forward to systems change

The rise of field catalysts represents a promising paradigm for driving large-scale social change. By leveraging the insights and lessons from existing coalitions, those in other domains can harness collective power to drive meaningful change at scale.

While this article was crafted with funders in mind, an increasing number of practitioners are turning to the Community Health Impact Coalition for guidance on the nuances of field building. If you're a practitioner seeking insights, explore our best advice [here](#).

We hope this can be the start of an ongoing conversation about how to make collaboration more visible, powerful, and effective in the social sector.

Dr. Madeleine Ballard is CEO of Community Health Impact Coalition, a global movement making professional community health workers the norm by changing guidelines, funding and policy. Her work alongside the Coalition has been featured in the New York Times, Foreign Policy, and Lancet Global Health. Through research, advocacy, and organizing with community health workers, she's driven policy changes that ensure quality care for millions—including those who provide it.

Community Health Impact Coalition is making professional community health workers (proCHWs) the norm worldwide. They create international guidelines. They increase global funding. And they win national policy.

Indisputable evidence confirms that CHWs improve health outcomes—with considerable equity and economic dividends. Governments can generate a 10:1 return on investment with community health workers. And proCHWs could save two million lives annually.

#11. Women and girls are facing unprecedented hardship in Afghanistan, but international development organisations can play an important role in continuing to fight for their access to education.



Jackie Fristacky AM
President of Afghan
Australian
Development
Organisation (AADO)

Jackie Fristacky AM, President of AADO, provides an important update on women and girls' access to education in Afghanistan. We must continue to support women and girls to achieve, flourish and learn even if it is a slow, multifaceted and complex process.

In 2022, young women and girls in Afghanistan were barred from attending secondary school and university. The Taliban also quickly restricted employment opportunities for women and girls to only occupations that align with traditional gender roles, such as midwifery, primary school teaching or working from home.

Today, access to education, quality of teaching and employment opportunities for women and girls remain alarming. For example, before Taliban rule, women held 35% of teaching positions in Afghan schools. However, many teachers have since left the country and are often replaced by those less qualified pedagogically. This has resulted in acute staff shortages, huge class sizes and reduced teaching quality. Compounded by worsening economic conditions, this combination has led to many families withdrawing children from school altogether – to work, marry or make other private arrangements. Even boys' secondary school attendance is reported to have decreased by more than 10% in 8 provinces and university attendance to have declined by 50%.

However, despite this unprecedented level of hardship and discrimination faced by girls and women in Afghanistan, we must keep fighting for their access to education. This is because women and girls' access to education enables them to reach their economic, social and political potential in society. Moreover, whilst the limited employment opportunities available for Afghani women may only represent a small fraction of their former occupations, those that remain are still emblematic of the intrinsic role women perform supporting families, local communities, overcoming skills shortages (particularly in health and education sectors) and contributing to civil society.

And it is in my role as President of the Afghan Australian Development Organisation (AADO), that I have seen how international development organisations on-the-ground in Afghanistan can play a critical and ongoing role in this process.

#11. Women and girls are facing unprecedented hardship in Afghanistan, but international development organisations can play an important role in continuing to fight for their access to education

First, international development organisations focusing on gender equality, education and women's economic empowerment bring an undeniable strength and experience to the complex system that women and girls face in Afghanistan. This strength is bolstered by a long, global and historical commitment to the ethos that women and girls' access to education, and women's economic empowerment, are cornerstones to healthy and sustainable communities.

Second, international development organisations focusing on education can leverage key tools and educational resources from overseas and international curricula, and then combine them with localised teaching and practices. This is possible even as the context in which they are operating becomes increasingly fraught and access to resources are minimised.

Third, as many international organisations rely on external funding they can be agile and quickly respond to policy shifts even when economic depression has set in.

Let's unpack some on-the-ground examples further to explain.



Image: Afghani girls. Source/credit: AADO.

Organisations such as AADO are striving to fill the huge gap in primary school education of Afghan women. Whilst still operating within Afghan Ministry of Education requirements, AADO is employing a community-based schooling model for literacy and numeracy courses. Funded entirely by donations and local goodwill, the program is taught by local women assessed with requisite skills and carefully organised through the support and involvement of local authorities. The program involves 5 larger village homes, each hosting groups of 20 women over the year. This focus on local teaching is critical. When international development organisations tap into local networks and are led by community leaders, even modest funding can have a high return compared with development aid through contractors or imported staff.

#11. Women and girls are facing unprecedented hardship in Afghanistan, but international development organisations can play an important role in continuing to fight for their access to education

In mid-2022, AADO initiated an accelerated Year 12 course for secondary schoolgirls to successfully graduate from high school. This course was then able to switch to online delivery when secondary schools were barred for girls. Also funded by private donations, delivery of the course is through liaison with local Afghan teachers, male and female, of an [Afghanistan Education Support Coalition](#). To date, 810 girls in Kabul have undertaken AADO's intensive online Science (Physics, Chemistry), Maths (Algebra, Trigonometry) and English Course (SMEC). Statistical Probability was also recently added to the Maths course at the girls' request – it is hard to overestimate the incredible spirit of these young women, despite their circumstances, that my team has witnessed.

More broadly, for the wider collection of international development organisations working on women and girls' education in Afghanistan, such as the [Indigo Foundation](#), [Mahoba's Promise](#), the [Malala Fund](#), [UNESCO](#) and AADO, there have been further flickers of hope for our work moving forward. In January 2024, the restriction on girls attending private secondary schooling was lifted meaning that girls can physically attend private secondary education, provided they are escorted to classes. Whilst a small step, the Edict is a relief for development organisations deeply anxious about the banning of any education beyond primary level in-person.



Image of SMEC course. As at 28 February 2024, 97 girls attend in person, 103 attend online and 65 use USBs provided by AADO as they do not have internet access. Source/credit: AADO.

#11. Women and girls are facing unprecedented hardship in Afghanistan, but international development organisations can play an important role in continuing to fight for their access to education

Critically, it has also been argued that this Edict indicates a possible recognition on the Taliban's behalf of several of the positive impacts of women and girls' education. Although no official reasons were given, on-the-ground it is believed the Edict responds to a recognition by the Taliban that the country cannot continue with such an acute skill shortage in schools, hospitals and other fields traditionally occupied by women. This is supported by the simultaneous inclusion of private and government medical institutes and hospitals providing educational services for Afghan girls. From contacts in Kabul, it is also thought the Edict is an acknowledgement that education is a channel by which the operating Government can attract foreign investment funding – which has become increasingly important as global economic sanctions continue to cripple the Afghan economy. Whilst our goal is not to fund schools to support the operating Government (indirectly via taxes), the Taliban policy shift indicates the upwards pressure international development organizations can play in advocating for the rights of women and girls to education and equality, and in highlighting the adverse impacts for the country of banning Afghan girls attending secondary schools.

Although no substitute for universal government education and still operating in small numbers, community-based and private schooling opportunities for women and girls plant seeds of hope and growth within the strict political system set by the Taliban. It is critical that we do not give up on Afghanistan but continue to support women and girls to achieve, flourish and learn even if it is a slow, multi-faceted and complex process. Even when faced with adversity, equipped with education and resources, the young women we work with are role models for other young girls and communities, fill critical skills shortages, and build female independence and confidence. They are the keys to unlocking change and hope for the future.

Jackie M Fristacky AM is President of the Afghan Australian Development Organisation (AADO). A retired lawyer and public policy analyst, she formerly taught at Melbourne and LaTrobe Universities, worked in Federal and State Governments including as a Tribunal member, then served as a Yarra City Councillor and Mayor. Born in Kabul, Jackie authored a memoir on her mother's life there: "My Mother and the Prince: Jana Shindler Fristacky in Kabul 1946-1952".

The Afghan Australian Development Organisation is a voluntary, nonprofit, non-government member organisation. Its primary purpose is to implement projects that assist in the reconstruction and sustainable development of communities within Afghanistan. Within Australia AADO seeks to support the Afghan community.

#12. Navigating complexity: the moment that defined how I conduct impact evaluations globally.



Matias Nestore
Research and
Evaluation
Associate at
The Life You Can Save

Matias Nestore, Research and Evaluation Associate at The Life You Can Save, reflects on a watershed moment that defined how he conducts impact evaluations globally. Matias argues against simplified monitoring and evaluation practices. Instead, it is critical to implement a qualitative approach to impact assessment that understands participants as active agents with unique circumstances and agency.

“I think that the problem is that nobody comes here, nobody knows how we live or what we go through and that’s why everyone thinks we’re evil.” – Francesca

Francesca looked at the recorder on the table, as if she had offended someone, straightened her back and stared at me, waiting for another question. I was interviewing her as part of an impact evaluation of an urban upgrading program in Naples, Italy.

The program’s ultimate purpose was to support out-of-school children in finding vocational traineeships, particularly in the peripheral areas of Naples where the challenges of street violence and police brutality are an everyday reality for young people. In response to these daunting circumstances, the theory of change for the program was elegantly simple: the nonprofit organisation would offer morning lessons in literacy and numeracy to the kids. Then, in the afternoon sessions, they would be paired with local business owners to learn a trade, fostering a direct link between education and practical skill development. This holistic approach was anticipated to yield a spectrum of positive outcomes, ranging from increased rates of school re-enrolment and completion, to the cultivation of part-time employment opportunities and, perhaps most importantly, to a potential reduction in crime rates within these marginalised communities.

However, the issue I faced when trying to assess this intervention was that I lacked a full understanding of the reality the children lived in. While school completion rates showed improvement, the underlying issue of low academic attainment persisted. Furthermore, the anticipated participation of children in vocational training failed to materialise as expected. Towards the end of the month dedicated to observing and documenting the program, I realised that what I had been missing was an understanding of children as active agents and not just as a treatment group. This realisation quickly became a watershed moment for my own practice and conduct when driving impact evaluations both in my native Italy and for international development programs globally.

#12. Navigating complexity: the moment that defined how I conduct impact evaluations globally

II. The Challenge of Understanding Participant Experiences

Francesca's perspective highlighted the disconnect between outsiders' perceptions and the reality of participants in social programs. When I came into the school, I knew these children had 'failed' other interventions. Nothing seemed to work and they were mostly framed through data points. They were aged 10-14, they had dropped out of school after completing primary, they struggled to read a full paragraph and do basic maths. As an outsider evaluating the impact of an intervention, it is easy to fall into the trap of simplification. We all enjoy modelling impact to simplify reality. Through an experimental lens, I could frame the program as a treatment that, when given to a particular group, would have caused an immediate positive reaction. This kind of attitude is what made me completely miss the impact the program was actually having, i.e., providing children with more agency over their futures and offering alternatives to the life-paths that were set for them. Previous evaluation methodologies, based on quantitative surveys, had helped nonprofits and funders in this and other similar settings identify that their programs weren't working. What they failed to do, however, was to provide any useful information as to why they weren't, and generate helpful insights to move forward. In a situation where a narrow perspective would have led donors and nonprofits to move away from this particular group of beneficiaries given that nothing seemed to work, the program staff and funders decided to keep iterating their intervention, learning, and developing more in-depth evaluation methodologies.



An image taken by Matias during his time on the project in Naples. Source/credit: Matias Nestore.

#12. Navigating complexity: the moment that defined how I conduct impact evaluations globally

Given the complex reality on the ground, I decided to integrate a qualitative approach to the impact assessment, one that would avoid reducing program participants to mere objects of evaluation. In collaboration with the nonprofit's staff, I chose to prioritise beneficiaries' agency and stories, how they saw themselves represented in the media and social sector, and what decisions they made in response to various 'treatments' they took part in.

When I learnt about the different ways children in the program were making decisions about their schooling, work and life chances, I understood that the program was doing much more than addressing learning gaps or providing vocational training, it was offering a diverse set of life and career options to children that may not otherwise have had them. Keeping beneficiaries' agency at the forefront of my evaluation helped me recognize participants as active agents with unique circumstances. It also helped the nonprofit's staff gain a more nuanced understanding of the program's mechanisms, its successes and failures. Most importantly it positioned program participants as vital partners in impact evaluation, generating a deeper understanding of context, program design and delivery that was used to improve the program's impact.

This approach to impact evaluation is one that I now work to integrate whenever I look at a particular program. It is also at the core of [IDInsight's Dignity Initiative](#) and is part of [The Life You Can Save's](#) evaluation framework.

III. Practical Steps for a Agency-Focused Approach

Working as part of The Life You Can Save's research and evaluation team, I face the challenges of impact evaluation day in and day out. We often have limited information about a nonprofit's work, the context they work in, and the program partners they serve. Spending weeks on qualitative impact assessment is anything but practical, which is why placing our trust in those working on the ground is key. These developments are mirrored in the recent trends within the sector, which increasingly emphasize trust-based philanthropy and initiatives rooted in local communities. These shifts hold the promise of bridging the gap between funders and the intricate realities of impact work at the grassroots level. I strongly advocate for donors and grant-makers to complement rigorous impact assessment with more empathetic, participant-centered methodologies, as these approaches are better suited to accurately capturing the nuances of intervention impact.



Source/credit: [ThisisEngineering_on Unsplash](#).

#12. Navigating complexity: the moment that defined how I conduct impact evaluations globally

In addition to following these positive trends, here are a few steps anyone working or interested in the sector can take:

Learning: An invaluable resource I recommend to anyone engaged in international development is “[Voices of the Poor](#)”. This comprehensive research, curated by the World Bank, draws upon interviews and testimonials from over 60,000 individuals living in poverty. It provides a nuanced understanding of their lives and contexts, challenging prevailing stereotypes by highlighting their agency, dignity, resourcefulness and aspirations for change. Moreover, it underscores the highly contextual nature of poverty, shaped by diverse factors such as geography, culture, politics and social norms.

Immersion: While dedicating extended periods to observing specific programs may be impractical, site visits, such as the Australian International Development Network’s “[Insight Tours](#)”, offer invaluable learning opportunities. They allow for firsthand experience of on-the-ground realities and facilitate direct engagement in conversations with participants.

Dialogue with nonprofit staff: Engaging in conversations with staff involved in nonprofit organisations provides insights into how they view their programs and prioritise the agency of beneficiaries. In my own practice, I make a strong effort to gather knowledge from those working directly in the field. This includes understanding their perspectives on program effectiveness, identifying areas where it may lack depth, and acknowledging the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day operations, all while exploring how they learn about and actively support the aspirations of beneficiaries.

Matías Nestore works as a Research and Evaluation Associate at [The Life You Can Save](#), leveraging his background in Education and International Development. The Life You Can Save makes “smart giving simple” by recommending charities that save lives and improve well-being where each dollar goes the furthest. Prior to his current role, he co-led [Shaping Horizons](#), a social enterprise incubator born out of the University of Cambridge.

The Life You Can Save is a community of people who believe in taking action. Their role is to help you make the most effective donations possible in the fight against extreme poverty. Since their founding in 2013, they have compiled a list of research-backed charities working on interventions against the multidimensional factors of poverty, resulting in over \$100 million donated to high-impact charities.

#13. For conservation efforts to move forward we must center Indigenous voices and take a human rights-centric approach.



Mahum Qazi
Communications
Assistant at
Project Expedite
Justice

Mahum Qazi, Communications Assistant at Project Expedite Justice, outlines the tension between international accords that aim to protect the environment and the “fortress conservation model”. Whilst such accords strive to improve planetary health, in practice they can fail to consider how many Indigenous Peoples have fostered healthy ecosystems and, can instead lead to human rights violations and land dispossession.

Protected areas (PAs) are often considered a cornerstone strategy in the fight against climate change. In December 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was unanimously embraced by over 190 nations. This international accord aims to protect the planet we all share. The framework comprises 23 targets dedicated to reversing species and habitat loss, one of which calls for the safeguarding of 30% of the Earth’s coastal, terrestrial, and marine regions by 2030. This target is colloquially referred to as “30×30.” The 30×30 goal coincides with an initiative called the “Global Deal for Nature,” or the 2015 Paris Agreement, to prevent a 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature increase that could cause irreversible environmental damage.

However, whilst the 30×30’s objectives are in pursuit of improved planetary health, in practice this accord often contributes to the “fortress conservation model.” Fortress conservation is premised on the belief that nature and mankind are inherently incompatible, and the only role that humans play in nature is one of destruction. It fails to consider the creative ways in which many Indigenous Peoples (IPs) have fostered healthy ecosystems that enhance biodiversity rather than threaten it for tens of thousands of years. Approximately 476 million IPs reside in areas that encompass 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity. While 30×30 was not adopted with the intent of furthering the fortress conservation model, its effects are contingent upon its local implementation – and too often, these efforts use a fortress conservation approach.

For example, PAs are often “created” on ancestral lands already inhabited by IPs. When following a fortress conservation approach, new PAs must be “cleared” of humans, which leads to dispossession and rights violations. Recent research by Project Expedite Justice has shown that conservation-motivated exile of IPs in key areas, such as Nepal, India, Tanzania, Cameroon, and others, are not isolated occurrences, but rather illustrate a systematic pattern of exclusion. When new PAs are established in Indigenous territories, the following often occurs: (1) land dispossession and displacement – IPs are told to leave the lands they occupy; (2) consequent indirect human rights infringements; and (3) grave human rights violations and abuses committed to persuade IPs to abandon efforts to stay on or near their ancestral lands, now “PAs”, even if they have nowhere else to go.

#13. For conservation efforts to move forward we must center Indigenous voices and take a human rights-centric approach.

In this context, it is clear that if conservation efforts in international development are going to move forward sustainably then they must involve collaborative and inclusive efforts to respect land rights and recognize the vital role of Indigenous communities in preserving biodiversity.

Whilst slow, this shift in conservation effort policy is underway and being applied by organisations such as [Survival International](#) and [Greenpeace](#).

At PEJ, our vision of sustainable development is rooted in this commitment to protecting IP's rights. At the heart of our programs is the belief that we can protect the environment while respecting the knowledge and practices of Indigenous communities. And, in turn, this can lead to the achievement of SDG:16 “fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence”.

On the other hand, we reject the “fortress conservation” approach that displaces IPs, excludes them from decision-making processes that impact their lives and severs them from rights to lands they have traditionally occupied. At their worst, atrocities committed in the name of conservation have been [reminiscent of colonial-era policies](#) or mindsets that posit Indigenous paradigms as a threat to wildlife or natural habitats, such as the Chenchu people in [Telangana State, India](#). However, there is also evidence of IP-managed areas delivering equally good results at conservation as other approaches and without human rights violations, such as the [Maasai pastoralists in Tanzania](#).



Image: Batwa women in Burundi. Source/credit: Pixabay/PEJ

#13. For conservation efforts to move forward we must center Indigenous voices and take a human rights-centric approach.

After all, nothing about this process is inevitable and the safeguarding of our planet should not come at the expense of the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous populations, especially not while corporations and states with “large ecological footprints and greenhouse emissions” continue business as usual. Conservation does not necessitate infringing on the rights of Indigenous communities who preserve biodiversity on their own lands. Collaborating with local organizations and partners in various conservation sites to pursue accountability for human rights violations committed in PAs and help prevent such abuses from occurring in the future is a further critical step forward.

Sustainable, rights-protecting development must also acknowledge IPs’ inherent right to self-determination (and, as an extension, self-determined development), as well as rights to their ancestral lands. Indigenous property rights are closely tied to conservation. In fact, land tenure insecurity in Indigenous Peoples’ lands is an underlying driver of deforestation. This underscores the need for conservation models to integrate Indigenous knowledge and practices. For example, in the Brazilian Amazon, where Indigenous property rights have been recognized through a legal process called demarcation, there has been a notable reduction in deforestation.

Finally, it should be understood that Indigenous-led conservation efforts offer a contrasting vision that is both successful but also cost-effective. Indigenous community-owned or designated forest areas, which span approximately 370 million hectares across the globe, are often regions of high biodiversity. IPs take an active role in maintaining their land. Indigenous communities invest an impressive \$2 to \$4 billion annually in resource management and conservation, equivalent to one-quarter of the total expenditure by the global conservation community on public protected areas. Subsequent analysis by the Rights and Resources Initiative in 2018 corroborated these findings, emphasizing that IPs and local communities are major investors in conservation efforts. This is especially notable since official and international funding allocated to PA systems remains insufficient, particularly in global-majority countries.

At PEJ, we are urging leaders, such as members of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, to center Indigenous voices and take a human rights-centric approach to conservation. We also welcome opportunities to partner with other people of goodwill and organizations that want to further development in a way that protects the planet, and respects and centers Indigenous rights and practices.

Mahum Qazi is the Communications Assistant at Project Expedite Justice. Previously, she received her Master’s in South Asian studies from Columbia University where she specialised in modern South Asian history and post-atrocity nation building efforts.

Project Expedite Justice (PEJ) is a United States-based NGO founded in 2016. PEJ’s mission is to use all available legal options to seek justice for individuals inadequately protected under the law, who cannot access legal resources, and who are exploited by governments, corporations, or others. PEJ applies a novel, victim-centered approach to addressing mass atrocities.

#14. Beyond cupcakes: why engaging young men in gender equality initiatives, such as IWD, is key.



Hannah McNicol
Communications
and Research Lead
at AIDN

Following IWD 2024, AIDN's Communications and Research Lead, Hannah McNicol, asks: how do we ensure that gender equality initiatives and events like IWD also spark interest in men, are spaces that they are likely to attend, and can meaningfully engage in? To answer this question, Hannah calls for a reflection on several innovative international development programs that focus on engaging young men to achieve gender justice for all.

Exactly this time last year, I wrote a small piece about why we must look to key tools and theories frequently deployed in international development, such as intersectional feminism, to enhance International Women's Day moving forward.

I wrote the piece following the markedly different interpretation and feel towards IWD in 2023. It was clear that for many women the cupcake was no longer going to cut it. The women asked to chair, speak at or run IWD events highlighted how this actually constitutes additional work, often on top of caring duties and career obligations. Fck the Cupcakes: why aren't there as many men attending IWD events? Others argued that IWD has become overly corporatised and is an opportunity for organisations to virtue signal their progressiveness without accountability. IWD also brought to attention issues such as reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women. 1 in 5 Australian women have experienced sexual violence.

The primary issue that my piece engaged with, however, was the idea that IWD is increasingly less inclusive. For low-income women, who are at the coal face of the housing, healthcare and economic crisis, the focus on 'girl bosses' and women in corporate leadership positions was and continues to prove increasingly out-of-touch. For many First Nations women, IWD is not a day to celebrate with continued widespread incarceration rates and high levels of family or partner violence. It was in this context that I argued that for IWD to move forward meaningfully we must centre intersectionality and acknowledge that the struggle of women can look and be experienced differently depending on intersections of ethnicity, class, sexuality, and identity.

Fast forward to IWD 2024 and I had the opportunity to reiterate this point to a larger audience as I addressed my old school in Melbourne as a guest speaker. It was a privilege to delve into the relationship between international development, intersectionality and International Women's Day (yes, I realise that is a lot of "inters").

#14. Beyond cupcakes: why engaging young men in gender equality initiatives, such as IWD, is key

Yet in the aftermath of IWD 2024, I had a new niggling feeling about IWD. My speech, reflecting many of the wider objectives of IWD, highlighted some of the barriers women face to women's economic empowerment and gender equality more broadly. It also focused on the transformative impact that economically empowering women can have on women, men, communities and entire economies at large.

However, as I walked away I couldn't help but think: my speech might have been a rallying cry for the young women in the crowd but where did the young men fit in? In particular, how was my speech, and many others on IWD, understood or perceived by young men, particularly when men and patriarchal structures are often highlighted as the culprit? And it got me thinking: how do we ensure that gender equality initiatives and events like IWD also spark interest in men, are spaces that they are likely to attend, and can meaningfully engage in? After all, it shouldn't be women who are shouldered with the entire task of achieving gender equality.

And there is no simple answer to this complex question. On the one hand, we do not want to tone down IWD or women's issues in order to make them more palatable to men. In fact, when the complexity and depth of the issues remain so clear, this simply isn't an option. My heart aches for the 19 women already killed in Australia in 2024 according to Australian Femicide Watch. But on the other hand, when we don't meaningfully and actively engage young men on days like IWD then we may risk IWD being (mis)interpreted as a day that is not about gender equality for all but instead alienates young (and older) men. Indeed, consider this recent, incisive report in The Economist that outlines the increasingly polarised views of young men and women globally. Worryingly, young men in Europe are now more anti-feminist than older men and perceive educated women as a threat to men's access to good jobs. These findings contradict the popular notion that each generation is more liberal than the previous one. The report also draws upon Richard Reeve's "Of Boys and Men" that explains that when young men interpret feminism and gender equality as suggesting there is something intrinsically wrong with men then it sends them to the online manosphere where anti-feminist positions are fostered. Some of this data may well underpin why male IWD attendance is low.

Consequently, it is in this critical context that I urge for a second return to theories and tools innovatively deployed in international development to enhance IWD once again. In particular, I want to highlight two international development organisations that are working to nip gender inequality in the bud. They work hard to make gender equality a-whole-of-community endeavor, to highlight how gender norms can be damaging to both men and women, and to engage young and old men in meaningful ways to become allies.



Image: Sad, sad cupcake. Source/credit: [mumblyjoe on Deviant Art](#)

#14. Beyond cupcakes: why engaging young men in gender equality initiatives, such as IWD, is key

First, consider the Grass Skirt Project (GSP) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Founded by Tahina Booth, GSP tackles severe gender inequality and violence against women and girls in PNG by uniting sport and gender justice. For Tahina, sexual and domestic violence against young women and girls in the Pacific is a key development priority to achieve healthy and happy communities. However, the core ethos at GSP is that sexual and domestic violence against women is not a problem to be solved just by women and girls. Instead, GSP sees engaging young men and boys as key to the solution and imperative to fostering a more inclusive and equitable PNG more broadly.

Consequently, GSP's programs, including the Gymbox and 10 Million Strong Leadership program, empower youth of all genders to challenge norms and embrace equity. They are designed to engage men and boys with something they love, sport and fitness, to ultimately heighten gender justice awareness and reduce gender-based violence. Moreover, by providing access to gym facilities and health resources for underserved communities, the programs are also achieving broader goals in the community related to holistic health, education and economic uplift.



Image: Boys For Change. Source/credit: [Dandelion Africa](#)

#14. Beyond cupcakes: why engaging young men in gender equality initiatives, such as IWD, is key

Second, let's talk about Dandelion Africa in Kenya. Founded by Wendo Aszed, Dandelion Africa is a women-led NGO focused on women's health and economic empowerment in the rural areas of Nakuru, Baringo, Kajiado and Narok counties. Amongst a number of impactful initiatives such as "Girls for Leaders", Women's Livelihoods and Sexual Reproductive Health programs, they also coordinate "Boys for Change". Boys for Change works with over 5000 boys and men through engagement in advancing gender equity and equality. The Dandelion Africa team believe that the program is necessary not only for the empowerment of women and girls, but also to transform the social and gender norms that reinforce patriarchy. The Boys for Change are trained on Menstrual Hygiene and information to champion and eradicate Female Genital Cutting (FGC).

Gender equality is for all. And it is organisations like Grass Skirts Project and Dandelion Africa that inspire me to work in the International Development sector everyday.

Both Grass Skirt Project and Dandelion Africa have been featured on AIDN's podcast Philanthropod here.

Hannah McNicol is the Communications and Research Lead at the Australian International Development Network ([AIDN](#)). She is also a Cookson Scholar and International Development PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne and University of Manchester, and an affiliate of the Global Development Institute. After completing a Masters of Development Studies (specialising in gender theory), Hannah worked at Good Return (an Australian NFP focusing on women's economic empowerment across the Asia-Pacific) and the Australian Red Cross.

#15. Swimming to end human trafficking: The power of individual fundraising.



Kim Miller
Schools and
Partnerships
Coordinator at Blue
Dragon Children's
Foundation

Kim Miller, Schools and Partnerships Coordinator at Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, reflects on what her upcoming swim across the English channel has taught her about the role of individual fundraising in 2024. Whilst many of the key discussions in international development may now center around major development financing, Kim highlights the ongoing impact that individual fundraising can have professionally and personally - in addition to supporting urgent causes.

At 13 years old, I became a fundraiser for the first time.

I'd visited the Royal Institute of Deaf and Blind Children on a school trip. When I was offered the chance to join the Miss Macarthur Junior Quest to raise money for them, I couldn't say no.

I wish I could remember how I raised the money but the truth is that I only recall that my fundraising skills were effective enough to have a 'Miss Silver' sash placed around my neck for fundraising and to go on to win the Miss Macarthur Junior Quest outright.

Somewhere deep, a seed was planted. In 2014 I walked away from my teaching career and towards a new role at [Blue Dragon Children's Foundation](#) – an Australian charity in Vietnam who supports street kids and rescues victims of human trafficking.

There are people who work for a pay cheque but I have never been one of those people. In order to be able to turn up day after day with a full heart and a focused mind, I need to believe in the work that I do, the people I do it for and with, as well as the people who lead me.

In fact, I believe in the mission and impact of Blue Dragon's work so strongly that this July I'm going to swim the English Channel to raise money and awareness for Blue Dragon's anti-trafficking work.



Image: Kim in the Miss Macarthur Junior Quest.
Source: Kim Miller.

#15. Swimming to end human trafficking: The power of individual fundraising

I first started swimming in the ocean in December 2020. I'd arrived home to Australia (and a two week hotel quarantine) after living in Vietnam. I was working remotely for Blue Dragon but that just didn't seem like enough. I missed that daily contact with the children, my colleagues on-the-ground and I hoped that my new remote working role could still make a difference to Blue Dragon's work. I couldn't swim a full kilometer at the time, and I was frightened of sharks, fish and even seaweed! However, as new friendships made in the ocean blossomed, I started to make the most of the deep blue open sky and my confidence grew. So did the number of hours I spent swimming in the sea each week.

In 2022, I swam 20km around Great Keppel Island and raised \$20,000 for Blue Dragon to rescue children and women who had been sold into sexual slavery. It costs around \$20,000 to set up comprehensive, highly effective anti-trafficking strategies in vulnerable communities. The money enables:

- the creation and implementation of community based anti-trafficking boards;
- surveying the community for vulnerable families and people who may have already been trafficked;
- creating sustainable incomes for families by gifting livestock to lift people out of poverty and reduce their need to take the sort of risks that can lead to being trafficked;
- running education programs for students; and
- keeping all of the local children in school.



Image: A Blue Dragon social worker reflects with a survivor of human trafficking in Vietnam.
Source/credit: Blue Dragon.

#15. Swimming to end human trafficking: The power of individual fundraising

That first fundraising swim was an incredible experience. However, I have now turned my sights to a bigger goal: swimming the English Channel and raising \$200,000 for Blue Dragon to set up anti-trafficking initiatives in 10 new communities. When an incredible friend offered to help me meet the costs of getting to Dover, the dream started to become a reality.

Importantly, however, this journey has also allowed me to reflect more deeply on the role of individual fundraising in international development in 2024. Even though many of the key discussions in international development now center around major development financing: raising capital for the Sustainable Development Goals, impact investing and private capital mobilisation, it is clear to me that there is still an important role for individual fundraising in our sector.



Image: Kim representing Blue Dragon in a charity swim.
Source: Kim Miller.

Professionally, this new goal has allowed me to grow confidence, network-build and reach out to new potential donors for Blue Dragon. While in the past my role had been working with students and teachers, in the past 12 months I've stepped far out of my comfort zone to meet with founders, CEOs, CFOs and movers and shakers at some of the most impressive and human rights minded companies in Australia. My individual fundraising project has proved incredibly effective when it comes to forging new, long-term collaborations and network building in our sector.

Personally, it has also given me courage to become a stronger advocate. I hope that my connections with Australian businesses and individuals within those businesses might inspire them to see the very human and global face of their impact when they go beyond complying with governance. The Modern Slavery Act in Australia is one step towards creating a free-er, more equitable world without slavery, but it doesn't go far enough. Blue Dragon goes beyond hoping that third and fourth tier supply chains are slavery free, to making certain that people are living lives where they can not just survive, but start to thrive, free from the cycle of poverty. I've seen first hand the impact when companies don't take these responsibilities seriously and I couldn't be more grateful to those who understand that what they do, and how they do it, really does matter – not just to their bottom line, but to our very humanity.

#15. Swimming to end human trafficking: The power of individual fundraising

And finally, it has also allowed me to share my passion for fundraising with my family, peers and network. My 13 year old niece has grown up seeing me live my life in two countries, torn between my love for my family and my need to do work that fills my soul. Earlier this year, as a childhood cancer survivor herself, she created her own fundraising group – a 24 hour walking group to raise money for equipment at Campbelltown Children’s Hospital cancer wards. I saw the pride in her friend’s faces as they walked, hand in hand around the oval, inspired by her tenacity to not only have survived leukaemia but to also become a fundraiser to help other children. And as she saw that pride in her friends and family’s eyes I could also see her grow a little taller. I was so proud to have been able to bring my own professional and personal fundraising experience to support her on her own unique journey.

Ultimately, I swim because I love it. And I raise money for Blue Dragon because I believe in the difference they make in the world. I’m so proud that our personal, transparent approach to fundraising and spending ensures that our supporters can feel comfortable that their money is making an enormous difference. And when swimming and my professional life get tough, I keep going because it’s such a privilege to be able to choose our challenges in life. I have that freedom through no deserving of my own. In return, I want every day I live to bring someone else a little closer to that same freedom.

Kim Miller is the Schools and Partnerships Coordinator at [Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation](#), an Australian charity in Vietnam. Blue Dragon is ending human trafficking in Vietnam, while simultaneously rescuing victims and providing the care and support needed to enable vulnerable people to thrive.

Kim has a background in education and social work and is a passionate advocate for equality and social justice. Her role at Blue Dragon combines her skills, knowledge and experience to support and inspire people around the world to understand and take action on the issues that impact disadvantaged young people in Vietnam – including poverty, modern slavery and human trafficking. She is also an ocean swimmer who will attempt to swim the English Channel for Blue Dragon this July to raise money for the implementation of anti-trafficking programs.

#16. Why I do what I do (along with many other people I respect and admire)



Mark Cubit
Co-Founder of
AIDN

Mark Cubit, AIDN Co-Founder, shares with our network what underpins his ongoing drive and commitment to the international development sector. Mark outlines two key reasons: first, because working in our sector affords him the privilege of working with and witnessing the incredible work of both the “doers” and the “funders” of international development. Second, because even whilst slow, the data shows that international development efforts are working.

Monday morning. Wake up. Coffee. Read the headlines: 77 percent of Americans think their country is on the wrong track.

Tuesday morning. Wake up. Coffee. Read the headlines: war rages on in multiple locations around our world.

Wednesday morning. Wake up. Coffee. Read the headlines: the latest Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion, which provides a barometer of social wellbeing in Australia, recorded its lowest score since the survey began 16 years ago.

And, I could go on...

With such a consistent stream of distressing headlines, it's hard not to feel that the current state of global affairs is particularly gloomy. Even in the countries designated as “lucky”, or what we refer to in the development sector as the “Minority World”, critical issues are tearing at the seams of societal cohesion: housing market crises, diminished access to healthcare, reduced faith in government, increasing inequality and poverty. If we turn our attention to developing countries (the “Majority World”) who are facing famine, enhanced impacts of climate change, refugee crises and economic despair, the warm glow of hope starts to dim even further.

However, if the state of global affairs in April 2024 is so desperate then why is it that a small but growing team of us spend our waking hours trying to support our neighbours in the Majority World? And why do we persevere even when faced with consistent and legitimate (some also not so legitimate...) concerns from those around us: Shouldn't we focus on our own domestic issues? What change could possibly be achieved “over there”? And particularly by a foreigner? Isn't international development rooted in historical colonialism and ongoing power inequalities? Will the money even get to who needs it the most?

#16. Why I do what I do (along with many other people I respect and admire)

Well, today I'm writing this piece because I can think of at least two reasons why I do what I do (along with many other people I respect and admire). And it's important to me that I share them with my network and beyond.

The first reason I do what I do is because I get the privilege of working with both the “doers” and the “funders” of international development. To put it simply they are incredible people. Doing incredible things.

At Partners For Equity, my role is to allocate financial resources from people with money to people without money. Its not a lot different to what I used to do in my previous life at Merrill Lynch where we facilitated the transfer of equity ownership from one holder to another. However, these days, I am more likely to marvel at an Aussie who raises millions a year to fight human trafficking in Vietnam than a CEO who raises millions in the IPO of his company. Let me explain:



Source/credit: [DMI International](#)

On the one hand, I get the opportunity to work with individuals who are so engaged and generous, so respectful and inspired by their fellow man in the Majority World that they transfer their own resources to local leaders abroad to make a difference. These funders are committed to an ethos that their own resources are already in excess of what they personally need to enjoy a good life in their own country. Moreover, they are dedicated to the belief that when these critical resources are deployed to the Majority World in a way that is diligent, culturally sensitive and locally-led – that the impact of these funds will far exceed what's possible in Australia. On the other hand, I simultaneously have the privilege of working with the “doers” of international development. No, they are not only distributing food parcels in desolate refugee camps

(although that is also something that requires ongoing support). These social entrepreneurs, program leaders, change-makers, and advocates are educating thousands of children from the poorest of families to become doctors and teachers in Tanzania. They are creating an industry of IT coders in regional towns in Western Kenya, and they are teaching boys to champion gender equality in the fight against female genital mutilation (FGM) and underage marriage. In sum, these local leaders are initiating tsunamis of change in their own communities.

And of course, there is no denying the role of self-interest and self-satisfaction that results as a product of being a part of this process. It is undeniably a wonderful gift to see these individuals at work, see these success stories in real time, and to know that I might have played some (small) role in it. Which takes me to my second reason...

#16. Why I do what I do (along with many other people I respect and admire)

The second reason why I do what I do? Because the data shows that even whilst slow, development efforts are working.

At the end of last year, Nichloas Kristof described 2023 as “maybe the best year in the history of humanity” in the New York Times. He paid heed to the 4.9 million child deaths in 2023. However, he also noted that it was “a million fewer than 2016”. There were also “100,000 people emerging from extreme poverty each day”. He further reminded us that polio and Guinea worm disease are close to eradication. Vaccines recently approved for malaria are also expected to save more lives in the near future.

I also recently read an update on development in Burkina Faso. Back in 2012, a group of generous Australians funded a three-year effort to broadcast child survival radio messages. At the crux of this public health initiative was encouraging parents to seek the right medical care for their sick children. Fast forward to 2023, and the first Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) on Burkina Faso released in eleven years reported that mothers who had been losing one in eight of their children before their fifth birthday were now losing one in twenty-one. Consequently, mothers were now having, on average, 4.4 children compared to 6.0 just eleven years earlier. In just a few decades, a solution to world overpopulation is emerging. The organisation has since gone on to successfully broadcast similar messages in over a dozen countries in Africa.



Image: The School of St. Jude in Tanzania. Source/credit: By [SchoolofStJude](#) – CC BY-SA 3.0

#16. Why I do what I do (along with many other people I respect and admire)

What's more? These examples are just a few tiny stars within the vast galaxy that makes up the international development sector. And as a number of increasingly powerful trends gather speed in our sector, such as trust-based philanthropy, decolonising development and local-leadership, we are only seeing more impact, more effectively. When local leaders and communities are appropriately supported onto the first rung of the ladder out of extreme poverty, it is undoubtedly them showing us how to climb the rest of the ladder. It happened in Brazil, it happened in Mexico, it happened in China. If you still don't believe it, wait until 2029 when India's first bullet train goes into operation. In Australia, we have not even got such a proposal off the drawing board.

To conclude: to my fellow partners in the sector, remember that you are making a difference. We need more feet on-the-ground. More people like you to keep up the fight.

And to the nay-sayers, whether it be disbelief, stinginess (billionaires who share barely any pennies...I'm looking at you!), or just "never getting around to it" I am not here to judge nor self-congratulate. Instead, I simply ask you to understand why we continue to do what we do. We do it because it does make a difference, because it constantly challenges you to confront your own biases and worldview, it's fascinating, it's enjoyable, and it's rewarding.

Mark Cubit is the Co-Founder of [AIDN](#) and sits on the Steering Committee. Mark has been active in the International giving space since 2005. In that time, foundations he has managed have funded over 200 NGOs in 38 countries. Mark's current responsibilities are with Partners For Equity, Cubit Family Foundation, Ripple Foundation, Planet Wheeler Foundation, Crap Foundation and he is Chair of The School of St Jude. Prior to his involvement in the philanthropic community, Mark was Managing Director, Australian Equities at Merrill Lynch Equities for 15 years.

#17. Hard-edged choices in Ukraine's survival war.



Gordon Weiss
Planet Humana

Gordon Weiss provides our network with a first hand account of the state of humanitarian response and the NGO sector in Ukraine in May 2024. Drawing upon his former role in Ukraine with the United Nations, Gordon is now heading a small-circle philanthropic organisation and currently in Ukraine determining how organisations are adapting and pivoting in the face of ongoing war. It is in this context that international funders, like Gordon, must make hard-edge choices concerning who to support and how to maximise impact in a war for survival.

A few days after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, I arrived on the border of Ukraine and Poland along with my former UN colleagues to pitch in with assistance. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians were streaming across the border, guided into Poland with great sensitivity by the usually brusque Polish border guards. The long lines of Ukrainian civilians, wrapped up against the freeze and clutching their household pets, were largely hushed, too exhausted to do more than quietly talk among themselves as they waited patiently to pass the border gates.

On the other side of the border that day, the Poles opened their doors instantly. In the border town of Premysl, virtually every household took in families of refugees. The town's population doubled overnight. At one stage a special train pulled in from Ukraine, and dozens of Polish troops gently carried scores of severely disabled children to buses for onward refuge in Polish shelters, away from the savage attack which had forced them from their homes. For those watching in shock at the fragility of that passenger manifest, it seemed an arctic silence had closed over us all.

The first people to help Ukrainians were Ukrainians themselves. Western Ukrainians formed soup kitchens and sandwich lines for those fleeing the Russian attacks on the east and centre. They opened their homes, drove people to the border, and joined the spontaneous citizen defence groups which stood sentinel at crossroads, alert to Russian saboteurs and infiltrators. Today, every Ukrainian continues to be affected. At 35 million, Ukraine's population is not too much more than Australia's. Well over a hundred thousand men and women have probably been killed and wounded fighting (the figures are secret).

Two years later, and now heading a small-circle philanthropic group called [Planet Humana](#), I've been in Ukraine for the past few weeks, determining for myself how we can best help our allies defend themselves. The chaos and spontaneity of aid during those first weeks have changed significantly. Just as Ukraine's army is now one of the world's most battle-hardened (albeit utterly

#17. Hard-edged choices in Ukraine's survival war

exhausted), so too has their aid sector evolved. Many NFPs or NGOs have consolidated into highly professional organisations doing everything from rescuing the elderly under fire, to trying to save the dolphin population apparently decimated by Russian aggression in the Black Sea (the Ukrainians accuse Russia of ecocide).

To my surprise, however, much today is still driven by volunteerism, personal sacrifice, organised humanitarianism in the face of extreme danger, and agile small responder units as frontlines shift and the emphasis of help for wounded troops and civilians morphs. War's necessities drive tremendous innovation as people fight for their family, homes, orchards and fields. Whatever the miscalculations and illusions of President Putin, he entirely under-estimated the Ukrainian national will to defend their independence – which includes those Ukrainians who identify with Ukrainian heritage as well as those who identify as culturally Russian Ukrainians.

Military analysts confirm what we already knew: the failure of the US and EU to adequately equip Ukraine's forces during the past winter has led to the Russian breakthrough which now threatens Ukraine's second largest city, Kharkiv. So even those organisations most vulnerable to an already arid aid funding landscape acknowledge that their efforts will be largely futile if Ukraine is not fully armed and defended. Even those caring for the elderly, the disabled, and the poor know that a large proportion of funds must be directed to the front, because their husbands, sons and daughters, and even grandparents are doing the fighting.

Accordingly, we've decided to spread our funds to emphasize the physical and mental survival of wounded soldiers and civilians, as well as some groups starved for assistance because of that very emphasis. Because manpower is so short, soldiers and wounded aid workers are cycled through recovery at breakneck speed and often sent straight back to the front. Moreover, for those invalided out, we think it's vital that these people can return to their families to form the foundations for a renewed Ukrainian society which may, eventually, rebuild this country block-by-block as a democratic guardrail on Europe's eastern flank.

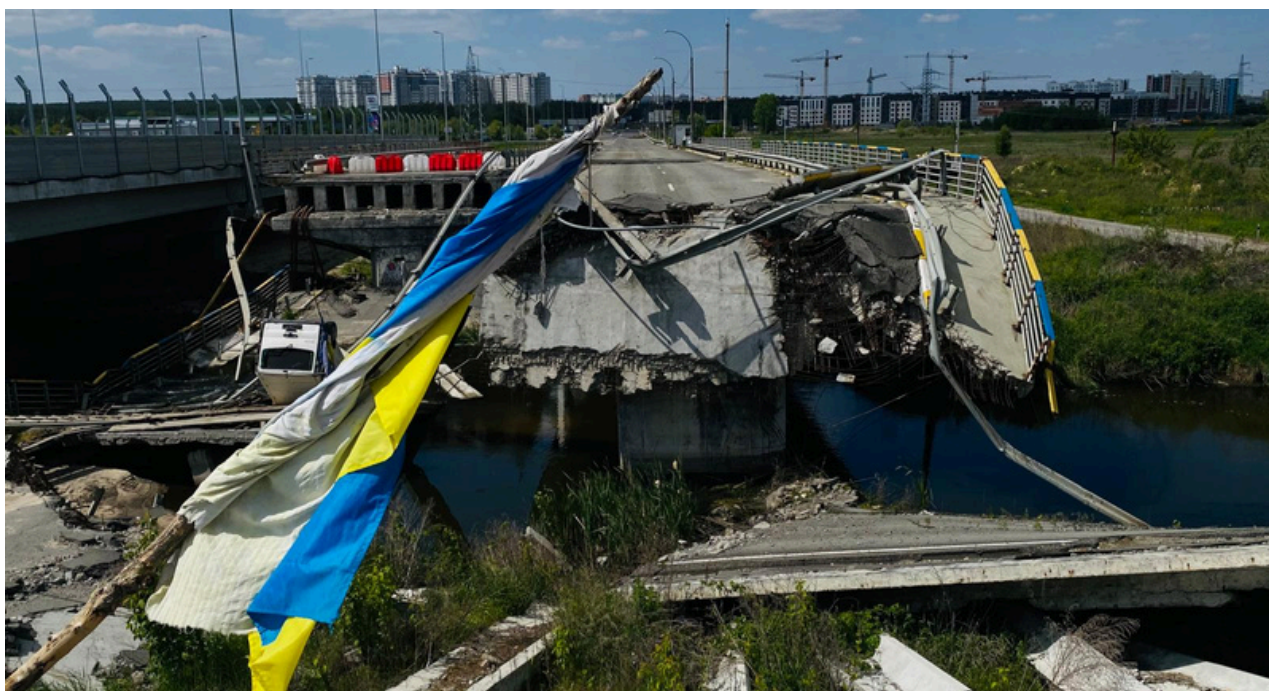


Image: The famous Bucha/Irpin bridge. Source/credit: Gordon Weiss.

#17. Hard-edged choices in Ukraine's survival war

Although we are mostly targeting some agile groups serving frontline areas (such as [animal rescue groups](#) and more discreet combat medical teams), Australians already form the backbone of support for Kyiv's [Institute of Rehabilitation](#), which treats more than 100 soldiers and wounded civilians every day. When I was there last week, I asked Dima, 25 years-old and wounded by tank shrapnel, whether he would return to the front. "Well," he laughed, "for you, the answer is yes, but for my girlfriend the answer is no. She'll kill me." It's the kind of true grit which is fortifying Europe's second greatest democratic expanse by land size against the advance of authoritarianism.

Ukrainians consistently thank me for being here. I've learned to quickly stop them, and to tell them that it is for those of us who believe in a people's right to self-determination, and who abhor the sight of one country bludgeoning another for a twisted notion of historical determinism, to do the thanking. Australians who wish to fortify Ukrainian lines, and their whole-of-society resistance, and to help Ukraine uphold the laws we hoped would bind and preserve our world after the unrestrained slaughters of World War Two, can best help by funding the medical and therapeutic treatment of these courageous people.

Gordon Weiss heads the Planet Humana group. He has worked with the UN, the OSCE, and in government service for three decades, focused on multi-faceted peacekeeping, political, and humanitarian crises in some of the world's most fragile zones. He was boots-on-the-ground in dozens of conflict countries, including first response operations. He is the author of "The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers."

Planet Humana is a new, small, low-cost philanthropy backed by High Net Worth individuals, founded to combine robust advocacy along with the active funding of grassroots groups which are responding to live issues.

#18. Why giving directly is not the path forward: The ongoing tension in Australian international philanthropy.



Anita Toy
Inaugural Executive
Director
of Myriad Australia

Anita Toy argues that the current parameters whereby Australian Private Ancillary Funds (PAFs) and Public Ancillary Funds (PuAFs) cannot directly fund overseas charities (without funding via an Australian registered DGR charity) is fit for purpose. This is because Australian intermediary organisations and local fundraising entities registered with the ACNC must comply with the ACNC's External Conduct Standards to promote transparency, and reduce the risk of funds being misused overseas.

Philanthropy is a cornerstone of our society: from delivering public services, to relieving suffering or unleashing advocacy, to encouraging social cohesion and community. Consequently, in many countries, including Australia, the Government offers tax deductions to individuals making donations to certain, regulated charities.

In 2023, the philanthropic sector was offered a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the future of giving in Australia through the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Australian philanthropy. Driven by the Australian Government's goal of doubling philanthropic giving by 2030, many Australian donors and leading organisations took up the opportunity and submitted their ideas, recommendations and insights to contribute to a more vibrant and thriving NFP and charities sector.

Of the 250+ submissions, a number of organisations highlighted barriers to international philanthropy. For example, many submissions noted that gaining DGR status (which allows NFPs to give their donors tax deductible receipts) is a cumbersome and complex process. In particular, the process is particularly complicated for NFPs that work across multiple sectors or issues, as they are required to jump through different bodies and hurdles, depending upon the nature of the diverse programs within their organisation (See AIDN's "[wrap up of the submissions](#)" for more examples). Responding to this, a great number of submissions advocated that the DGR regime could be simplified and made more equitable by extending DGR status to all charities registered with the ACNC, provided they do not use tax deductible funds for purposes explicitly specified as not related to their charitable work.

Another issue highlighted specifically in relation to international giving was that, at present, Australian donors, Private Ancillary Funds (PAFs) and Public Ancillary Funds (PuAFs), are unable to give directly to an overseas charity (only certain charities registered in Australia with DGR).

#18. Why giving directly is not the path forward: The ongoing tension in Australian international philanthropy

Therefore, overseas registered charities cannot receive donations from Australian donors, Private Ancillary Funds (PAFs) and Public Ancillary Funds (PuAFs) who require tax deductibility without intermediary support. In this context, a number of organisations proposed changes to the current legislation including: 1) that organisations with DGR2 status, such as Public Ancillary Funds, should be allowed to directly fund overseas charities, and 2) to expand the ability of organisations with current DGR1 status (such as Public Benevolent Institutions) to be able to give to dual causes, such as climate change and poverty alleviation, rather than be restricted to one cause.

Whilst there are strong arguments for giving donors a choice on how they want to support an overseas charity (and there are undoubtedly changes that need to be made to the DGR framework more broadly), I believe that the current parameters whereby DGR2s cannot directly fund overseas charities (without funding via an Australian registered DGR charity) is fit for purpose.

This is because giving directly to an overseas charity can pose risks and, at present, outweighs the benefits for the Australian government of passing on the tax deduction. For example, there is potential for mismanagement or misuse of funds, as it can be challenging for donors to verify how their contributions are being utilized without proper oversight mechanisms in place. It can also be challenging for donors to navigate different legislative, cultural, and language barriers.

Whilst this is less of an issue for donors who have the capacity and resources to conduct their own due diligence or the confidence and expertise to engage in trust-based philanthropy, the same cannot be said, for donors with limited capacity, resources, and low-risk appetite for giving. For donors recommending that the system enable them to give directly to an overseas charity, it is worth noting that many developing/Majority World countries do not have a dedicated independent regulator to ensure charities are legitimate or disclosing operational or financial information.



Image: Women in North Vietnam. Source/credit: [Ives Ives on Unsplash](#)

#18. Why giving directly is not the path forward: The ongoing tension in Australian international philanthropy

Instead, there remains a case for trusted networks, intermediary organisations like [Rotary Foundation Australia](#) or [Myriad Australia](#), or the local fundraising arm of an overseas charity registered with the ACNC to carry out philanthropic transactions on donors' behalf whilst still providing the donor with a tax deductible receipt. In fact, opting to channel donations through an intermediary rather than directly supporting an overseas charity can provide several advantages for both donors and the recipient.

This is because Australian intermediary organisations and local fundraising entities must comply with the ACNC's [External Conduct Standards](#) to promote transparency, ensure appropriate frameworks are in place to reduce the risk of funds being misused and protect vulnerable people overseas. Standards include control over their resources and activities, taking reasonable steps to protect vulnerable individuals, undertaking appropriate due diligence and mitigating the risk of fraud, bribery and corruption.

AIDN's [Compelling Case for Global Giving](#) presents a strong argument for supporting overseas initiatives and communities. Moreover, with issues such as climate change and poverty increasing globally, the Australian Government needs to think urgently about how to complement it's Overseas Development Assistance with private philanthropy overseas. However, if donors bypass Australian intermediaries or local fundraising arms to channel philanthropic funds abroad, the likelihood of funds being misused is higher.

Undoubtedly, our system of determining which charities can receive tax-deductible donations requires an overhaul and it was fantastic to see proposed changes and extensions to the DGR system in the "[Future foundations for giving: Draft report](#)". However, it is also crucial that Australian donors giving abroad not just recognise but actually feel empowered by necessary frameworks in place to protect and safeguard donations from generous Australians – all while receiving a tax deductible receipt for their donations.

Anita Toy is the inaugural Executive Director of Myriad Australia, a DGR1 organisation enabling Australian donors to support charitable projects across the world. Anita has over 14 years' experience in corporate, private and international philanthropy. Prior to joining Myriad Australia, Anita worked for the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group for 14 years where she managed the organisation's community investment program across 32 countries and strategically partnered with charitable organisations to achieve social impact.

Myriad Australia (formerly Give2Asia Australia) is a founding member of the global network for philanthropy – Myriad, an Alliance dedicated to supporting cross-border philanthropy. In 2023, Myriad members collectively granted US\$314 million to charitable programmes in 113 countries and across a variety of topics including education, the arts, disaster response, health services, climate change, and much more.

#19. Impact Investment in Bangladesh: A New Story.



Lily Van Berkel
Research Associate at
the Cross Sector
Development
Partnerships Initiative
(XSPI)



Nick Goryl
Impact Investing
Taskforce
Lead at the XSPI

Bangladesh is at a pivotal moment where it will need to balance economic growth with social development and inclusion. In this piece, Lily Van Berkel and Nick Goryl from XSPI highlight the role that impact investing can play in navigating this key moment in Bangladesh's rising economy. In particular, they examine recent moves by BRAC and the National Advisory Board for Impact Investment in Bangladesh (NAB), before unpacking the case study of Build Bangladesh.

For decades, Bangladesh has been leading a site of innovative development approaches, and it is now showing the signs that it is also ripe for impact investment. Some of the very first pioneers of impact investment made their mark in Bangladesh. For example, Muhammed Yunus' grassroots microfinance movement and the Grameen Bank demonstrated the vast opportunities available in Bangladesh's social impact sphere in the 1980s. Yunus's award-winning microfinance scheme, which saw small loans lent to communities to help them commence or run their own businesses as an avenue out of poverty, paved the way for the evolution of modern impact investment opportunities. The Grameen Bank initiative also highlighted how Bangladesh's government and communities were open to innovative ways of leveraging private capital for social impact.

With projections to become the 24th largest economy by 2033, and with a growing population of 170 million, today, Bangladesh has never been so ready for further business and investment. In fact, over the past decade, the key industries underpinning Bangladesh's economy have boomed, driven largely by growth in Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector. The sector's current value is US\$47 billion and is aiming to reach US\$100 billion in value in 2030.

However, as Bangladesh's market expands, so do calls for women's rights and equality in the industry. A changing regulatory landscape in the context of instances of female worker exploitation have highlighted that Bangladesh is at a pivotal moment where it will need to balance economic growth with social development and inclusion. This is no simple task and Bangladesh's civil society is working hard to achieve democratic progress whilst government, local, and international non-government initiatives are concurrently working to build stronger commitments to labour rights and ethical working practices. In this context, Bangladesh has become uniquely positioned for investors wanting to make a difference in the impact investment space.

Why Impact Investment?

Contrary to standard forms of investment, impact investment concerns itself with social benefit as well as financial profit. The [Global Impact Investing Network](#) (GIIN) defines impact investing as ‘investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return’. When investing with the intention of generating impact, investors facilitate atmospheres of growth, security and sustainability for the people and communities they choose to invest in.

Recently, large development organisations such as [BRAC](#), have realised the ‘[mutually reinforcing objectives](#)’ of the investment-development nexus, with established investments in the sectors of sustainability, housing, technology, and employment. Through such investments, BRAC has succeeded in the ‘[localisation](#)’ of funds and enabled community and national organisations to drive Bangladesh’s social development progress, rather than allow this sector to be overshadowed by international entities. This localisation drives lasting and sustainable change.

Additionally, establishment of the National Advisory Board for Impact Investment in Bangladesh ([NAB](#)), has seen both [social and environmental advocacy](#) joining Bangladesh’s foreign investment agenda. The NAB launched the Bangladesh Impact Investment Strategy and Action Plan (BIISAP) in 2022 to guide the Impact Investment Ecosystem development process in Bangladesh. Rather than ignoring social inequality and environmental damage, [emerging impact investors in Bangladesh](#) are supporting civil minorities by using their position to enable infrastructure projects that prioritise environmental sustainability.



Image: Local women collecting drinking water from PoP Tower, Bangladesh. Source/credit: XSPI

Build Bangladesh

One entity that has been leading the Bangladesh impact investment scene since 2016 is Build Bangladesh. With close ties to XSPI, Build Bangladesh is an innovative organisation working to mainstream impact investment in the country. In 2017, Build Bangladesh identified that Bandarban, a regional community in Bangladesh, had limited access to safe drinking water. Women and girls were travelling a long distance to collect water, which was often contaminated with bacteria, and the community faced extreme water scarcity due to prolonged dry seasons.

In response to this identified problem, Build Bangladesh commenced the Prokriti o Paani project a financial investment project with a compelling social outcome. The project utilized locally sourced resources and community groups to build sustainable water towers. This project increased the community's access to clean water, saved over 61,000 collective hours that were previously spent on water collection, and empowered women and girls to access income and education opportunities. This project and others have established Build Bangladesh as an innovative financing mechanism with development progress integrated into its business model.

Build Bangladesh is now one of many exciting impact investing organisations emphasising the untapped opportunities present in the Bangladesh impact investment market, and showcasing how investors can support social and environmental progress whilst simultaneously receiving economic returns.



Image: PoP Tower at Provaat Para, Bandarban, Bangladesh. Source/credit: XSPI

#19. Impact Investment in Bangladesh: A New Story

Moving forward

With the nation's rapidly growing and diversifying economy and population, Bangladesh's impact investment sector is on the precipice of expansion. Australian donors, investors, and those already focused on impact investing have an incredible opportunity to mobilise their financial investments in support of a positive social return for our Bangladeshi neighbours. To continue to facilitate social and environmental progress alongside economic growth, it is key that Bangladesh, alongside Australian impact investors, work together to expand this impact investment sector.

Lily Van Berkel is a Research Associate at the Cross Sector Development Partnerships Initiative (XSPI), specifically working with the initiative's Bangladesh Working Group. She is currently studying a Bachelor of Law (Honours) and Global Studies (specialising in International Studies) at Monash University.

Nick Goryl is working to establish a social enterprise in the garment industry in Bangladesh – a clothing factory where people earn a fair wage, a share of profits and have a workplace that is inclusive, safe and dignified. Following 10 years of research, planning and a discovery trip to Bangladesh, Nick has established a detailed business plan and a broad network of influential leaders in the Bangladesh garment industry willing to support the venture. Nick comes at this endeavour with 15 years' experience as a manager in the health industry, a Masters in International Development and a deep passion for working to address poverty and disadvantage.

XSPI (Cross Sector Development Partnerships Initiative) is a network of development and business sector professionals committed to catalysing social change through cross-sector collaboration and diverse in-country connections in Bangladesh as well as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

#20. Empowering girls in India – one meeting at a time.



Surbhi Mahajan
Senior Programme
Officer -
Communications
at The Hunger Project

The question as to what “empowerment” actually means or how it manifests on-the-ground remains a perennial question at the heart of international development. In this piece, Surbhi Mahajan shares with our network how she and her colleagues at The Hunger Project India have come to learn how “empowerment” emerges in many different and diverse compositions, extending to safety, mobility, food security and active citizenship. To illustrate this, Surbhi takes us to Bihar, India to meet various young women and girls who currently attend the Sukyana Club.

As I inched closer to Muzaffarpur, one of the four districts in Bihar where The Hunger Project (THP) India’s adolescent girls’ program is situated, I was looking forward to meeting a spirited member of the Sukyana Club in Bihar. Bihar, a state in India, ranks low in several development indicators, especially health and education of adolescent girls. For instance, while the national female child marriage rates have fallen from 47.4% in NFHS-3 (2005-2006) to 23.3% in NFHS-5 (2019-2021), child marriage in Bihar remains higher than the national average. The focus of THP India’s work in Bihar remains on addressing root causes of their multiple vulnerabilities. Hence, there is an accelerated effort to work on components of agency, voice, leadership, life skills education and related actions they can take up towards building a better life for themselves.

The Sukyana Club or building girls’ collectives is one such crucial initiative. Through leadership workshops, life-skills education, and targeted interventions, the program fosters self-development and responsiveness, and empowers local girls with knowledge about their needs and rights. And today, I was on my way to listen and document stories of change in my role as the Senior Program Officer – Communications.



The first young woman I met that day was Neeta. Neeta, a 17-year-old girl from Bihar, explained to me that she dreams of a dignified livelihood despite her family’s financial struggles: “I had to work on other people’s farms to support my parents, which affected my schooling and left me exhausted”. Determined not to drop out of school, Neeta sought advice at a Sukanya Club meeting. They suggested she learn tailoring to earn a decent income and avoid physical labour.

#20. Empowering girls in India – one meeting at a time

Neeta discussed the idea with her parents and approached a woman in her community to learn basic cutting and stitching. Unable to pay fees, Neeta offered to tutor the woman’s children in exchange for lessons. Since then, Neeta has completed her schooling and now earns INR 1000 per month (AUD \$18). Neeta aims to further her skills at a government institution specialising in stitching and embroidery, steadily working towards a better future for herself and her family.

Immediately, Neeta’s story demonstrates an example of what can be achieved when young girls in India, and globally for that matter, are “empowered”. However, the question as to what “empowered” actually means remains a perennial question at the heart of international development. In this case, Neeta’s tailoring has led to her becoming economically empowered, and to build confidence along the way. However, throughout this THP project in India, my colleagues and I have also learnt how “empowerment” emerges in many different and diverse compositions beyond simply economic empowerment, and can even extend to safety, mobility, food security and active citizenship.

For example, in another Sukanya Club meeting, members Zainab, Reema, Jamuna, Simran, and Mehreen have demonstrated how empowerment is also closely related to safety and mobility. With support from THP India, they drafted a petition to address the lack of solar street lights in their area, which is closely related to the safety and mobility of women and girls. In turn, they were able to secure three additional street lights within a month. The young women explained that these acts of leadership were possible because they were given safe learning spaces. Safe, collective spaces empower girls to challenge patriarchal structures, realise aspirations beyond early marriage, and advocate for societal change.



Image: School play on delaying marriage, Bihar, India. Source/credit: Anurag Banerjee for The Hunger Project

#20. Empowering girls in India – one meeting at a time

Another form of empowerment that has become clear throughout our work is the empowerment and agency that comes from adequate social protection schemes. For example, as Lalita from Jamui shared, social protection is vital for many rural households because it offers income security against poverty, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. She had become aware of the government schemes through the Sukanya Club and explained how the family benefit scheme provided her family with INR 20,000 (AUD 362) after the death of the primary income earner of the family. She also explained how in the immediate aftermath of her family members' passing, the scheme helped to mitigate immediate hunger risks and improve her understanding of available council services.



Image: Pinki Adolescent Girls program, Bihar, India. Credit/source: Anurag Banerjee for The Hunger Project.

Relatedly, another form of empowerment, whilst perhaps less commonly known, is the empowerment and agency that comes with nutrition security. For example, recently, a field team member who works closely with the girls, highlighted to me the impact of kitchen gardens, another small but critical initiative undertaken by the program. She had met Himani, who mentioned how growing a kitchen garden helped address the nutritional needs of her family. Across 35 gram panchayats, adolescent girls have created 210 nutrition gardens. Himani explained that she finds the task both fun and intellectually engaging, while Misha noted the benefits to her pregnant sister-in-law and the family's reduced dependency on male members. These young women firmly believed that this initiative has increased their decision making power within their households, fostered pride and has, in turn, enabled them to make more informed decisions about their futures, such as delaying early marriage.

#20. Empowering girls in India – one meeting at a time

The need to empower girls, whether economically, socially, in relation to safety and mobility or through nutrition, is inherently underpinned by a moral imperative. However, it is also the key to unlocking sustainable solutions to more equal and just societies. Educated and empowered girls are more likely to invest in their families' health and education, leading to better food security and economic stability. The Sukyana Club is just one of many interventions within the wider gender equality ecosystem in India working to achieve gender equity. Recent studies such as '[Mapping Incremental Change In A Complex Society](#)' (2022; supported by American Jewish World Service) similarly reiterated that creating safe spaces, collectives, and empowering girls are critical pathways through which girls become confident while bargaining with patriarchy. By supporting these initiatives, funders and philanthropists can foster an important process of knowledge-building and consciousness-raising that transforms individual lives and communities in Bihar, India and beyond.

Investing in adolescent girls is essential because they deserve to live with dignity and safety as equal rights-holders. They are ready, but they are now asking “Are you ready?” (Audre Lorde)

Surbhi Mahajan is currently working as the Senior Programme Officer – Communications at The Hunger Project (India Office). She has a MA in Development Studies from the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), and an M.Phil/MA from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Modern History. Her primary area of interest includes understanding discourses around gender, social justice, human rights, protest spaces, civil society and participation, and utility of visual representation in documenting change narratives.

[The Hunger Project India](#) is a non-profit organisation committed to empowering elected women representatives and adolescent girls in rural India. Our interventions remain committed to our vision to ensure gender equality and social justice. To this end, we explore new and innovative pathways that seek to amplify voice and agency as well as strengthen the practices of good governance,

#21. Developing development leadership? The value of purposeful leadership education for the development sector.



*Dr Denisse Rodriguez
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*Dr Natalie Cunningham
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Dr Denisse Rodríguez, Dr Jaco Renken, Dr Matthew Mabefam and Dr Natalie Cunningham highlight how in a period of increasing complexity and challenge for international development, collaborative and critical leadership has never been more important to both navigate practical and ethical issues, and influence organisational decision making. The expert guest contributors argue for purposeful leadership education, such as the “Master of Leadership for Development”, moving forward.

In the field of international development, it is widely held that “development experts” extend to a diverse range of stakeholders including the beneficiaries, donors and practitioners. However, at present, less attention has been given to the need for leadership that can support processes of transformative change, and for professionals to build the competencies they need to enhance the performance and success of their operations.

Moreover, at a time when leadership is critical, the development sector is reporting a gap in talent and capabilities to take on these roles effectively. In fact, ‘lack of leadership’ has long been understood as a constraint in the sector (WEF [2015](#); ODID [2023](#); CISL [2024](#)) and one that continues to trouble the field today (Devex [2020](#)). The first imperative for the sector is therefore to acknowledge and understand the enormity of the challenge (Hodges & Howieson [2017](#)), before instigating critical discussion concerning solutions to addressing this gap. Such is our core purpose in writing this piece today.

#21. Developing development leadership? The value of purposeful leadership education for the development sector

Defining development leadership in a rapidly changing context

To define leadership competencies and capabilities as they are relevant to the development sector, first, we must include management techniques – such as planning, strategising, coaching and mentorship. However, the various challenges and issues shaping the sector simultaneously require a suite of complementary abilities. For example, to successfully reflect the diverse needs and circumstances across the Global South/Majority World, localisation and decolonisation have emerged as cornerstone philosophies when developing sustainable development programs (GDI [2018](#)). The necessity of collaborative leadership – the ability to gather and listen to diverse perspectives to create effective change – also sits at the core of contemporary development programming which intrinsically seeks to address global and local power inequalities.

The rise of ‘billionaire giving’ (Schmitz and McCollim [2021](#)), the growing influence of the private sector (OECD [2021](#)) and the impact of South-South cooperation (Gray and Gills [2015](#)) further require leadership styles which demonstrate flexibility and adaptability. Leaders in development are now being asked to negotiate these dynamics whilst also balancing the importance of successfully sourcing funds with a focus on the communities where aid is needed most.

Moreover, the political nuances of foreign aid, from financial considerations like government budgets to the political use of aid in jostling between rival powers (Milner and Tingley [2013](#)), further require development leaders today to navigate these complexities while maintaining the openness and transparency that underpin the sector’s credibility.

Effective leadership in the development sector has wide-ranging impacts well beyond simply the success of a single aid organisation. The development sector rises and falls on its reputation. On one hand, ongoing exposures of systemic abuse of power by people in positions of influence, including high-profile incidents within the development sector, have further reinforced the need for ethical leadership.



Image: Streets of Kathmandu, Nepal.
Source/credit: [Austin Curtis on Unsplash](#)

Meanwhile, in a funding landscape where aid is subject to government budgets and external funding sources, development organisations must simultaneously display efficiency and effectiveness in their outcomes. In fact, there has been a marked intensification in pressure both to perform and to demonstrate that performance over the last two decades (Salamon [2010](#)).

In sum, in 2024, leaders in the development sector face an array of opportunities to make change, but also unique and complex challenges. Navigating these shifting dynamics is no simple task and a deficit in such dynamic leadership has been highlighted. In [2020](#), the Devex Talent

#21. Developing development leadership? The value of purposeful leadership education for the development sector

Outlook survey reported that 58 percent of employer respondents nominated leadership, planning, strategy and coaching as the hardest-to-find soft skills. Other skills identified by respondents as difficult to find included empathy and cross-cultural sensitivity, problem-solving, flexibility, adaptability and conflict resolution.

Developing development leadership

Moving forward, to help professionals fill the leadership gap identified by development employers, and help the sector benefit from more reflective and effective leadership, there is a demonstrable need for targeted and purposeful leadership education.

However, leadership theories and frameworks cannot simply be imported from other sectors – such as the corporate world. Instead, critical adjustments must also be made to ensure these tools reflect the unique needs and culture of the development sector (Hodges & Howieson 2017). On-the-ground, the repertoire of competencies required for leadership in the development sector includes mental frameworks that enable strategies like critical thinking, problem-solving, project management and collaborative decision-making.

Experiential learning, short courses and targeted training can help to address these areas. Dedicated, longer-form education formats, such as the “[Master of Leadership for Development](#)”, which offer the opportunity to practise and ingrain contemporary leadership competencies can also play a pivotal role. The “Master of Leadership for Development”, co-convened by the University of Melbourne and the University of Manchester, is a fully online program that focuses on developing the practical capabilities, global connections and collaborative outlook needed to fill the leadership gap in the development sector. The course has four key focuses:

- Building the capability for critical thinking grounded in knowledge and research about the sector’s unique needs;
- A focus on sustainable, long-term development and retention of the strategic thinking and behaviours that enable effective leadership in the sector;
- Opportunities for practical use of competencies in simulated scenarios relevant to their professional experience; and
- The use of digital tools, platforms and networking practices that reflect current and future behaviour in the sector.



Source/credit: [Esteban Benites](#) on Unsplash

#21. Developing development leadership? The value of purposeful leadership education for the development sector

To finish, as a group of development scholars working between the University of Melbourne and the University of Manchester, we've had the exciting opportunity to bring the nexus of development theory and praxis together as we co-convene the "Master of Leadership for Development". Through both this project, and through our wider roles as industry experts, we've learnt that it is high-time that development leadership itself is developed, nurtured and enhanced.

This will be vital for delivering valuable and lasting outcomes for actors at all levels of the sector. For individuals, it will enable career progression and more effective development practice. For organisations, it will support the accomplishment of their strategic goals and development objectives. For the sector itself, it will encourage its health and efficacy into the future.

Dr Denisse Rodríguez is a lecturer in Development Studies and holds a PhD in geography and Master of Environment from the University of Melbourne, Australia, as well as a Master in International Relations from the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Ecuador. Her areas of expertise include alternative development trajectories, environmental governance, socio-ecological conflicts and extractivism, and decolonial approaches to knowledge production.

Dr Jaco Renken is co-director of the Master of Leadership for Development and holds a PhD in information and communications technology for development from the University of Manchester, England. His areas of expertise include international development, leaders and their role in socio-economic development, and the implications of data and data analytics for the development sector.

Dr Matthew Mabefam is a lecturer in Development Studies and holds a PhD in anthropology and development studies from the University of Melbourne, as well as a Master of Philosophy from the University of Ghana. His areas of expertise include the politics of international development, inequality, and religion and neoliberalism. His research examines mainstream development models and their applicability in developing contexts, including some of the emerging tensions.

Dr Natalie Cunningham is co-director of the Master of Leadership for Development and holds a PhD in executive coaching and Master of Business Administration from the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. Her areas of expertise include leadership development, organisational culture and talent management, and she is currently leading a study looking at lifelong learning and the educational needs of the development sector.

Co-developed by the University of Melbourne and The University of Manchester, the **Master of Leadership for Development** focuses on developing the practical capabilities, global connections and collaborative outlook needed to fill the leadership gap in the development sector. As a fully online, part-time program, it is ideal for those working full time. Graduate with confidence, networks and translatable competencies that support your leadership path in the sector and help you make effective change through your work.

#22. The only good development program is one you can leave behind.



Tamar Kosky Lazarus
Chief Development
and Communications
Officer
at IsraAID

Tamar Kosky Lazarus, Chief Development and Communications officer at IsraAID, reflects upon her recent visit to two IDP (internally displaced persons) camps in Juba, South Sudan. Tamar argues that the humanitarian community must do better. In particular, the development sector must work to ensure that development programs do not create external dependencies nor exit without a follow up plan. Instead, for any development program to be sustainable, it must be community-led and given the time and space to flourish under local leadership.

After spending the last few days visiting two IDP (internally displaced persons) camps in Juba, South Sudan, everything began to feel increasingly bleak.

The situation of the almost 45,000 people living in the two overcrowded camps felt intractable and honestly, quite hopeless. There were people living under unsuitable old tarpaulins in temporary shelters crammed one next to the other. There was no running water and no water source available other than paying to fill your jerry can from a visiting water truck. There was extreme food insecurity and unaffordable education options, leaving young children roaming the camps all day long. There were also no functioning latrines which, in turn, has led to a huge prevalence of open defecation, and high incidents of sexual and gender-based violence. Both in the camps and more broadly, the people of South Sudan, especially women and children, face severe levels of violence, exploitation, and abuse (including conflict-related sexual violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and early childhood marriage).

On this visit, I had the opportunity to speak with various IDP camp leaders. IsraAID has been operating in South Sudan since it was declared as the youngest country in the world in 2011. With almost 60 staff from all different nationalities, the team have run a range of development programs: from running women and girl friendly spaces, to managing cases of rape and other extreme forms of sexual violence, placing and supporting vulnerable child survivors in safe houses, and raising awareness against common harmful practices such as forced marriage.

Unfortunately, multiple conversations with camp leaders seemed to indicate time and again the heavy dysfunction of the humanitarian ecosystem. The camp leaders highlighted how deep dependencies have been established between extremely vulnerable communities and international aid organizations.

#22. The only good development program is one you can leave behind

When funding is diverted, teams exit the camps and leave communities in the lurch. In fact, leader after leader spoke about the ‘great exit of NGOs’, clearly placed in impossible situations following extreme funding cuts. They noted how food distributions were unceremoniously stopped, leading to acute hunger; broken latrines left abandoned with no maintenance contingency plans in place; health facilities closed and abandoned. This trend persists even as a huge influx of IDPs and returnees continue to flow into the camps as the war in Sudan rages, with more than 8.7 million displaced, as well as ongoing violence in Ethiopia. The 2.2 million internally displaced persons represent the world’s fourth most neglected displacement crisis.

In this devastating context, I asked the team how they manage to continue day in and day out when the need is so huge and so insurmountable, when partners and peer organizations continue to exit, when community leaders request more and more support. I questioned how we could really create sustainable change with communities so deeply suffering, and our budget stuck and spluttering as funding opportunities for South Sudan continue to decrease.

But then we visited Lemon Gaba. And I learnt that the strongest and most sustainable programs are those that can be left behind to flourish under the leadership of local actors without external support.



Image: The women-and-girl-friendly space in the Lemon Gaba Community of Juba, South Sudan, May 2024. Source/credit: IsraAID/Bon Malas Wal.

#22. The only good development program is one you can leave behind

Lemon Gaba is a community of over 10,000 IDPs and returnees. Here, we met a vibrant group of unbelievably strong, vocal women and entered a thriving community space started by IsraAID under a tree in 2018. It was handed over to the community in 2021, as an enclosed space containing two bamboo structures for a women and girl's space and child friendly space, as well as a functioning water tank.

I recall visiting then, and hearing the worry and fear of the community as the team prepared for their exit. However, the social workers and community mobilisers reassured the community members that it was their space, and that they had enough skills and resources now to run it themselves.

Walking back in, in 2024, I was humbled and deeply moved by the group of united women – genuine change agents in their community – that welcomed us with smiles and song.

In fact, it is clear that the space is so much better – with genuine community ownership proving transformative. The bamboo structures have been reinforced and improved, and the floors cemented. These changes have been possible by using money from the income generating activities that were set up at the start of the program in 2019, and sustained by leaving sewing machines and training the community in basic sewing and tailoring.



Image: The women-and-girl-friendly space in the Lemon Gaba Community of Juba, South Sudan, May 2024. Source/credit: IsraAID/Bon Malas Wal.

Mama Rose told us about her six children, and how all her girls are now enrolled in school. Her oldest is about to be one of the first girls in the community to start secondary school – this got a rapturous applause from the women! She also explained how the income generation activities and the women's cooperative had enabled her to save money to send them to school. She ended with a powerful statement that her girls will not experience GBV, like their mother and her friends. This is because they are educated now and committed to making sure the community lives in peace. She further explained that because IsraAID also worked with the men in the community, the influence of the women's group was also able to be felt by all members of the community- no matter the gender.

#22. The only good development program is one you can leave behind

Another element of the original programme continuing to be employed by the women was “rabita” – weekly home visits to community members. They get together every morning, collect firewood and make tea; they sit together to discuss the main issues they and the community are facing, and then they go in small groups to visit families to discuss issues including early childhood marriage, incidents of sexual violence, and gender equality. Finally, the Community Emergency Council was also still strong and functioning. The women and men who lead this manage severe cases of violence and rape, and ensure cases are referred on to relevant organizations, and all potential repercussions are considered.

Mama Rose explained that the community still has issues. The youth have got little to do and thus often turn to violence and alcohol. They are still facing issues of GBV, rape and forced marriage, although they believe instances of these violences have lessened due to their continuous awareness raising. However, this group of resilient women believe they can handle the issues that face them, if they do it together, and leverage the foundations of the programme. They would of course love some additional support, but they also emphasized that they will manage alone if they must.

Ultimately, this site visit reinforced to me that the humanitarian community must do better. These protracted, neglected crises need sustainable community owned interventions that can bring change. We need donors to commit to long term support, even when other global crises distract us. We must create solutions that don’t cause dependency from disadvantaged communities. We cannot exit with no follow up plan.

Instead, like the amazing camp leaders I met in Juba, we must let our strong teams of national staff work hand in hand with communities to build models that are owned by the community and meet their needs. We must also give these models time and space to work.

We must build many more Lemon Gaba models and empower many more Mama Roses.

Tamar Kosky Lazarus is the Chief Development and Communications officer at IsraAID and has worked on dozens of IsraAID’s humanitarian missions around the world. Tamar holds master’s degrees in Middle Eastern Politics and Local Government Management and Policy and has over 15 years experience in fundraising and communications in the non-profit sector. She lives in Israel, with her partner and 3 children.

IsraAID is an international humanitarian non-governmental organization. Since 2001, IsraAID has become synonymous with a rapid response to humanitarian crises and a long-term commitment to working with affected communities. During and after emergencies, IsraAID partners with communities to re-build their lives – and their futures – together. As of July 2024, IsraAID has responded to more than 100 emergencies, in more than 60 countries.

#23. Maximizing the impact of cardiac care in East and Southern Africa: The power of knowledge sharing, specialised training and fostering South-South partnerships.



Jo Star
CEO of Save A
Child's
Heart, Australia

Drawing on her role as CEO of Save A Child's Heart, Jo Star argues that external medical expertise and resources remain vital in cardiac care in many African countries. But impact is only maximized when coupled with investment in knowledge sharing and training.

Many countries in East and Southern Africa such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Somaliland & Kenya face serious challenges in providing adequate healthcare, particularly in specialised fields like paediatric cardiology. Congenital heart disease (CHD) affects approximately one in every 100 children worldwide, yet in many of these African countries, the resources and expertise to diagnose and treat these conditions are severely lacking. This is due to a lack of trained specialists, coupled with limited access to medical technology, medical infrastructure and financing gaps for major public health facilities. In turn, many children suffer or die from preventable heart conditions each year.

Recognising this pressing need, many health and medical focused NGOs and professionals, and overseas funded programs (such as the Deutsches Herzzentrum Heart Centre collaboration), have been rallying to fill these broader health care gaps, but to also perform urgent heart surgeries or catheterisation procedures. This provision of external expertise and resources in contexts where the medical need is so great has been and will remain vital.

However, the urgency of this situation is only continuing to grow. In particular, as pressure on African health systems continue to mount in the face of population growth, financing gaps, changing climate and food systems, it has become clear to myself and my team at Save a Child's Heart, or "SACH" (an Israeli humanitarian non-profit dedicated to providing life-saving cardiac care to children in the Majority World), that a sustainable programmatic approach means far more than just providing immediate medical aid. It also means transferring knowledge and skills to local healthcare professionals, in addition to fostering South-South knowledge exchanges, so that local professionals can perform these complex heart procedures, set up the necessary systems and procedures, and ultimately provide long-term care within their communities – without foreign or external support.

#23. Maximizing the impact of cardiac care in East and Southern Africa: The power of knowledge sharing, specialised training and fostering South-South partnerships

Building Capacity: Training the Next Generation of Paediatric Cardiac Teams

The first step in this process, or achieving our longer term goal of localisation, is building capacity and transferring specialised medical knowledge. The medical teams at Save a Child's Heart operate on the belief that sustainable change comes from within. To this end, the medical teams have been actively involved in long-term partnerships with institutions in Tanzania, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Rwanda to train African doctors, nurses, and medical staff in paediatric cardiac care. This comprehensive training program includes hands-on experience in the diagnosis, treatment, and post-operative care of children with heart disease.

In particular, doctors and nurses are invited as “fellows in training” to Save a Child's Heart centre in Israel, where they undergo rigorous medical training alongside world-class specialists. This donor funded training or fellowships are not just limited to the technical aspects of cardiac surgery, anaesthesia or intensive care, but also include the development of a holistic understanding of patient care, from initial diagnosis to rehabilitation. They also have the added value of providing those in training the opportunity to treat patients from different countries, including their own.

To further maximize impact beyond North-to-South knowledge exchange, South-South knowledge exchange, learning and leadership is also encouraged and fostered between the medical staff we work with. Aligned to SACH's own underpinning Jewish principle of “Tikkun Olam”, translated as “repairing the world”, our South-South Cooperation model strives to foster more locally-led and appropriate partnerships and knowledge exchange between countries in the Majority World or Global South.



Image: SACH's programs. Source/credit: Ilan Balaban.

#23. Maximizing the impact of cardiac care in East and Southern Africa: The power of knowledge sharing, specialised training and fostering South-South partnerships

Upon completion of their training, these medical professionals return to their home countries equipped with the skills and knowledge to establish and operate paediatric cardiac units. For example, on a recent catheterisation medical mission to Rwanda, myself, the SACH medical team and two Rwandan Doctors in training had the privilege of meeting with paediatric cardiac surgeon Dr Yayu Mekonnen. Dr Yayu trained at SACH and is now regularly performing open heart surgeries. Moreover, Dr Yayu has become a pioneer in his field, and is leading one of the first teams in his country that specialise in performing complex heart procedures on children.

Importantly, we've also found that this training and fellowship program has been one of our most engaging and impactful parts of the program from the point of view of our generous donors. Amazed by the fact that it only costs AU\$60K a year to support a fellow in training, several of our key donors have been consistently financially supporting multiple fellows at a time to complete their training for years.

The ripple effect

Since commencing in 2014 we have also learnt that the impact of this training extends far beyond the individuals who receive it. There have been multiple examples whereby the medical staff we have worked with have not only gone on to perform their new trained specialities in cardiac care but have also instigated key processes of mentorship and training for others in their own community.

It is this ripple effect that SACH is most proud of – because it means that the medical expertise we can provide on our end is ultimately being localised to have the greatest impact. After all, it has been shown time and time again that whilst medical care should be aligned with global standards, it must also be sensitive to the nuances of the cultural and social systems in which it is taking place. In Tanzania, for example, the establishment of a local Paediatric Cardiac Centre for Excellence, which consists of a team of 22 SACH-trained medical personnel, has drastically reduced the need for children to travel abroad for surgery, saving countless lives and reducing the financial burden on families and the healthcare system.



Image: SACH's programs. Source/credit: Ilan Balaban.

#23. Maximizing the impact of cardiac care in East and Southern Africa: The power of knowledge sharing, specialised training and fostering South-South partnerships

As these local teams grow in expertise and experience, they are also passionately contributing to the overall strengthening of their local healthcare infrastructure and systems. We recently heard from several SACH-trained doctors in Rwanda that they have also been working on the creation of national level programs focused on diagnosing and treating congenital heart disease.

A Sustainable Model for Global Health

In an age of polycrisis (from climate change, to increasing poverty, famine and geopolitics) the need for the provision of foreign medical expertise, resources and labour in the Majority World will likely only increase. However, as the need for our work only continues to grow, the team at SACH has quickly learnt that long-term and sustainable solutions to health in international development must also be accompanied by a focus on capacity building and knowledge transfer – both through North-to-South but also South-to-South channels. Only when a development program is actively designed to empower communities to take control of their healthcare needs, reduce dependency on external aid, localise medical care to be sensitive to the nuances of their social and cultural dynamics, and foster a culture of self-reliance will the greatest impact be maximised.

The proverb, “Give a person a fish, and they’ll eat for a day. Teach a person to fish, and they’ll eat for a lifetime,” rings true as these trained paediatric cardiac teams continue to save lives and transform their countries from within.

Jo Star is the National CEO for Save a Child’s Heart AUSTRALIA. She has a Bachelor of Business & Communications, majoring in Marketing from Edith Cowan University. She has worked in the Not for Profit sector for over five years. Her areas of expertise include organisational structure, business development and marketing.

Save a Child’s Heart treats children suffering from congenital and rheumatic heart disease who have little access to care in their own countries. They also train medical professionals from these countries and raise the level of paediatric heart care worldwide. To date, Save A Child’s Heart has conducted 30 surgical and catheterisation missions and more than 70 cardiology clinics around the world, examining over 9,500 children. In 2018, Save a Child’s Heart received the United Nations “Population Award” for outstanding achievements in population and health.

#24. Building shared value for development outcomes: The importance of Cross Sector Development Partnerships (CSPs).



Zoey Diaz
CEO at the Cross Sector
Development
Partnerships Initiative
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Jasmine Stephens
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Drawing on their roles as CEO and Senior Research Associate at the Cross Sector Development Partnerships Initiative (XSPI), Zoey Diaz and Jasmine Stephens highlight the importance of CSPs for breaking down institutional and sectoral silos, and disrupting traditional development models by fostering the mutually beneficial exchange of skills, knowledge and resources.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together” – African Proverb

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They aim to address the world’s most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace building, and justice. These challenges are complex, requiring coordinated efforts and a broad and diverse range of capabilities and resources. No single sector can tackle these challenges alone. As such, SDG 17 explicitly calls out the importance of partnerships in achieving the SDGs, with several targets related to multi-stakeholder engagement.

A cross-sector partnership (CSP) is as it sounds: when two or more sectors (government, business, non-profit etc.) come together to address shared challenges and achieve common goals. CSPs offer the exciting potential to break down institutional and sectoral silos and disrupt traditional development models by fostering the mutually beneficial exchange and leveraging of skills, knowledge and resources. One of the most successful examples of CSP at a global scale is Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance. Gavi engages across governments, multilateral institutions, private sector pharmaceutical companies, nonprofits and civil society with the shared objective of increasing access to vaccines in low-income countries. Since inception Gavi has prevented millions of deaths from diseases like measles, polio and pneumonia. The success of Gavi can be attributed to the ability to clearly define shared goals but also ensuring that there is shared value across all stakeholder sectors involved.

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However, despite the growing consensus that development needs CSPs, the architecture of international development does not incentivise innovative and sustainable collaboration. The project-driven nature of development programs encourages efficiency, short-termism, and cordoned-off scopes that prioritise donor needs. The development sector is also significantly under-resourced as aid generosity is shrinking. The value of CSPs- therefore lies not only in their capacity to target complex problems, but as part of a broader shift away from donor-client transactional programs towards effective, sustainable transformations that development desperately needs.

While initiatives such as Gavi are emblematic of the impact that CSPs can have, there remains a dearth of platforms outside of specific funded projects and initiatives that aim to incubate enduring development partnerships. The Cross Sector Development Partnership Initiative (XSPI) was established with a mission to help fill this gap. XSPI emerged following an Executive Roundtable hosted at Melbourne Business School in 2019 that focused on sustainable development and the need for new operating models, including innovations in partnership. XSPI established a network of stakeholders across the sectors of government, business, philanthropy, NGOs and academia/research and operates as a platform to identify and promote opportunities for CSP in development in the Indo-Pacific region, with a current focus in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.



Image: XSPI partners in Indonesia conducting a workshop on business strategy for MSMEs. Credit: XSPI network partners.

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XSPI is unique in that it does not fund or implement projects, rather it serves as a platform that brings sector stakeholders together. XSPI aims to be an objective broker, focused on finding opportunities to create shared value between variable sector partners, enabling cross sector projects and strategic partnerships to emerge. XSPI's work is in support of the SDGs and operates with a "5C" approach: Catalysing, Collaborating, Coalition Building, Co-Creating and/or Convening new development partnerships and/or projects.

One example is a strategic partnership between XSPI and the World Mosquito Program (WMP) based out of Monash University. WMP has a novel technology called Wolbachia, that when bred into mosquitos prevents the transmission of dengue virus. WMP and XSPI partnered in support of a dengue elimination project in Bali province, Indonesia. Through this partnership, XSPI was able to assist WMP with developing a robust social and economic benefits case, connect them to relevant Australian and Indonesian government stakeholders and implementing NGOs and map out a strategy for engagement with private sector business in Indonesia to progress the project. XSPI is currently exploring potential opportunities for program implementation in Bangladesh.

Another project highlight is The Civil Society (CSO) Sustainability Program, which has been co-created by XSPI's Papua New Guinea (PNG) Working Group members. The pilot program is based in the Highlands region of PNG and was developed from the acknowledgement that local CSOs (including Community Based Organizations, NGOs and Faith Based Organizations) assume much responsibility for rural outreach and service delivery yet are generally denied voice and agency by local and national government and are often left behind in current models of donor funding and aid delivery. The XSPI Working Group members undertook a feasibility study, consulting with many Highlands based CSOs to understand their challenges and needs, and what kind of model would best support them.

The insights from this feasibility study soon became the genesis for the CSO Sustainability Program. The proposed pilot phase will support an established host agency and two provincial based agencies to provide a range of support services to local CSOs including training, operational and program support, and access to infrastructure/digital connectivity that will build local capacity and embody the ethos of locally led development. The long-term intention is that, if successful, the model can further be scaled and bring in other stakeholders across philanthropy, government and business.

Successful CSP examples like Gavi and XSPI-supported projects make a compelling case for the power of collective impact in driving transformation. Partnering horizontally towards a common goal has the potential to amplify impact and, more importantly, sustain progress. Despite being a common misconception, cross sector partnerships don't have to be, and are not always, based on funding models. In reality, they offer the unique potential to break down institutional and sectoral silos and disrupt traditional development models by fostering the mutually beneficial exchange of skills, knowledge and resources. If cross sector partnerships are oriented towards common goals that address the shared challenges facing us today, they signify a rewarding pathway towards a more equitable and resilient global community.

#24. Building shared value for development outcomes: The importance of Cross Sector Development Partnerships (CSPs)



Image: XSPI partners in PNG. Source/credit: XSPI network partners.

Zoey Diaz was appointed XSPI CEO in March, 2023. She has over a decade of experience in the philanthropic sector, having spent a majority of her career with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where she focused mainly on vaccine preventable diseases and the evidence to policy to implementation pathway for new vaccine introduction. She has also worked on initiatives aimed at identifying opportunities for increased public-private partnerships focused on undernutrition in developing countries and has consulted with global non-profit institutions on strategy and business development. Zoey has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Washington and a Masters in Health Policy, Planning and Finance from the London School of Economics and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

Jasmine Stephens is a Senior Research Associate at the Cross Sector Development Partnerships Initiative (XSPI) in their Indonesia Working Group. She is currently studying a Masters of Applied Anthropology and Development at the Australian National University.

XSPI (Cross Sector Development Partnerships Initiative) is a network of development and business sector professionals committed to catalysing social change through cross-sector collaboration and diverse in-country connections with a current focus in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. XSPI supports efforts to achieve the SDGs by breaking down the silos between government, business, NGOs, philanthropy, and academia/research.

A huge thank you to our guest authors for their fantastic contributions to The AIDN Beat.

If you would like to submit a thought leadership piece to The AIDN Beat, then please get in touch with us (via hannah@aidnetwork.org.au) and we will share our editorial guidelines.