

ZIMBABWE PARTNER AND DONOR SHOWCASING & NETWORKING EVENT

Beyond the Funding

Honest Conversations on Building Impact

EVENT REPORT



Harare



Beyond the Funding: Honest Conversations on Building Impact

EVENT OVERVIEW

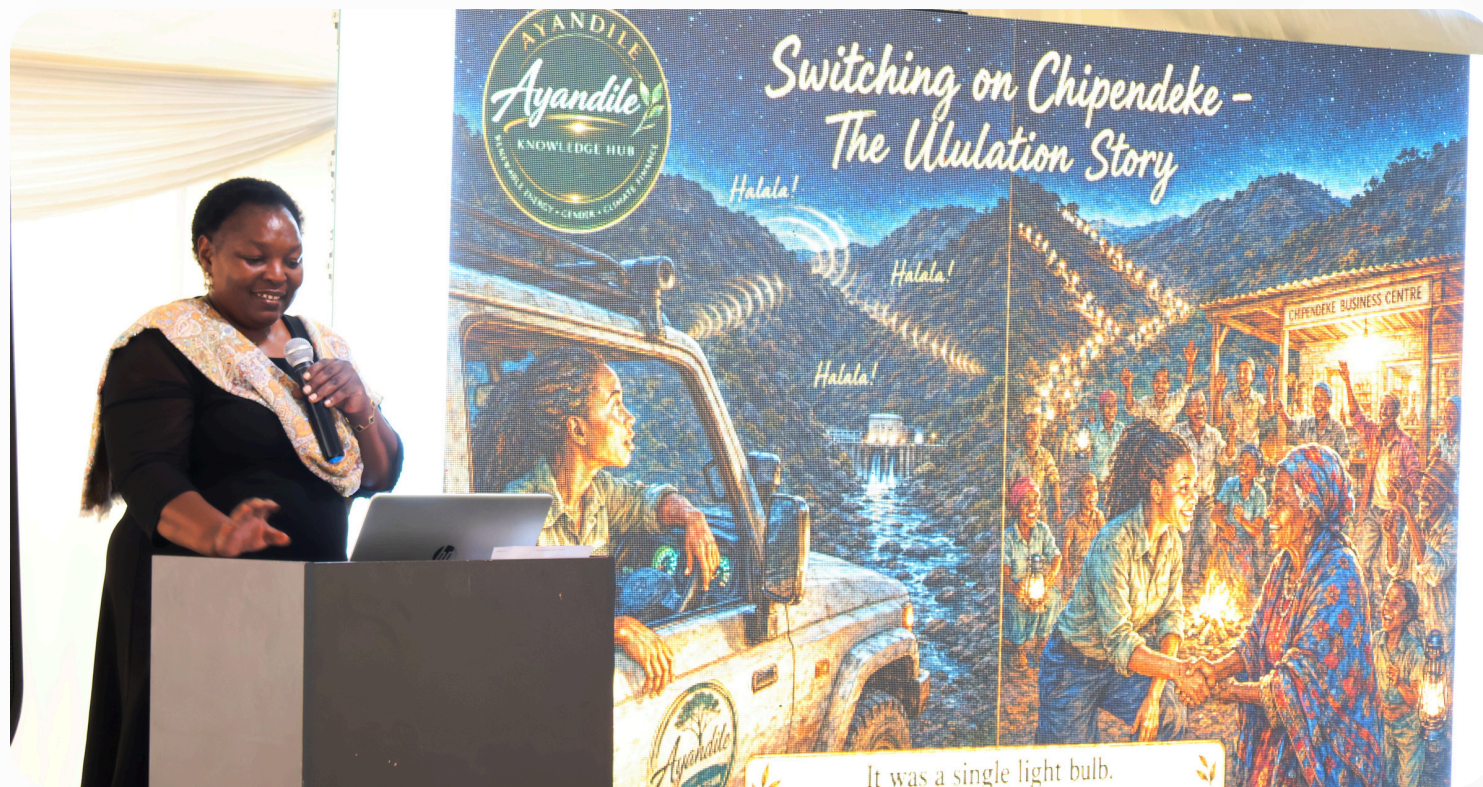
The Zimbabwe Partner and Donor Showcasing and Networking Event brought together doers and donors to a space curated for honest conversations rather than traditional presentations. The purpose of the event was to create a space where donors, partners, entrepreneurs, and ecosystem actors could build meaningful relationships, share honest experiences, learn from one another, identify collaboration opportunities and commit to future action.



1. Stories from the Field: Building Connection Through Shared Experience

Chandirekera Makuyana

Chandirereka Makuyana, a board member and founder of Ayandile, shared "Inspiring Stories While We Learn." Her light talk focused on solar energy, sparking insightful discussions on sustainable energy solutions and their impact on communities.



Patrick Gwaza

Patrick shed more light on what funders can do to create greater impact, highlighting the importance of strategic investments, collaboration, and long-term support for entrepreneurs and community-driven initiatives.



Several common themes emerged

-  The importance of listening to communities themselves.
-  Accurate identification of the need that best serves the local context.
-  Passion and commitment to creating positive social change.
-  Resilience and determination in the face of economic and operational challenges.
-  Innovation and creativity in addressing community needs.
-  Learning from failure and adapting approaches.
-  The value of strong partnerships in achieving impact.

Participants reflected that meaningful impact is often driven not only by resources but by persistence, relationships, and a shared commitment to solving community challenges.



2. Honest Conversations: The Realities We Do Not Often Discuss

Restricted Funding Models

Participants expressed concern that many funding structures do not adequately reflect implementation realities, and organisations are frequently expected to deliver significant impact while operating with insufficient operational support.

Challenges raised included:

- Limited access to unrestricted funding.
- Having to work with multiple currencies.
- Funding that does not adequately cover organisational costs.
- Unrealistic reporting and compliance requirements.
- Short proposal development timelines.
- Limited support for staff wellbeing and organisational strengthening.
- Funding restrictions that limit innovation and flexibility.



2. Honest Conversations: The Realities We Do Not Often Discuss

Competition Versus Collaboration

A recurring theme was that funding systems can unintentionally encourage competition rather than collaboration, and many participants felt that stronger incentives for consortiums and collaborative grants could help address these challenges.

Participants observed that:

- Organisations often compete for the same limited opportunities.
- Collaboration is encouraged in principle but not always incentivised in practice.
- Trust between organisations can sometimes be undermined by resource scarcity.

People Behind the Numbers:

It was highlighted that there is a need to recognise the human side of development work, and there was strong agreement that sustainable impact requires investment not only in programs but also in the people delivering them.

Concerns included:

- Staff burnout.
- Staff attrition.
- Heavy workloads.
- Increasing pressure to deliver more with fewer resources.



3. Collaboration Café: **What Is Working** **and What Is Holding Us Back**

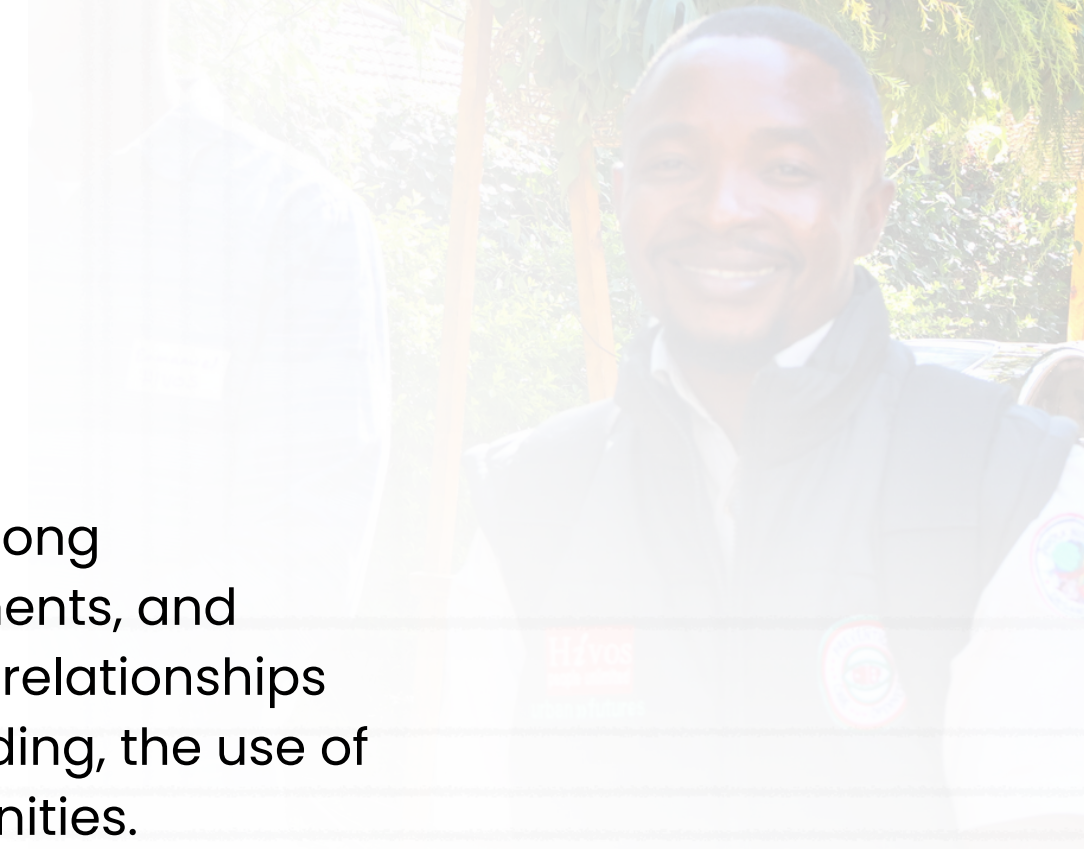
Most organisations are driven by passionate, dedicated leaders. Organisational strengths include a strong commitment to real community impact, innovation and adaptability in the face of changing environments, and effective storytelling and evidence generation. The ecosystem as a whole benefits from existing donor relationships which are relational and long term, from peer learning opportunities to partnerships and coalition building, the use of technology as an enabler of impact and continuous capacity building with organisations and communities.

Positive highlights include building on shared goals and values, building trust and ownership, having honest conversations even when difficult and keeping open to feedback. The importance of listening and learning from communities was emphasised in the stories and conversations.

A recurring theme in what is standing in the way was restricted funding and lack of core funding. Often operational costs are underfunded and there is a lack of funding for start up initiatives. Donor compliance requirements are time consuming and confining. As implementers need to listen to communities, donors need to listen to implementers.

Organisations talked of overdependence on donor funding and a need to diversify income streams. Limited institutional support made it hard to plan ahead for sustainability and to keep skilled staff. People talked of the difficulties in successful collaboration. Sometimes there is a lack of trust, egos get in the way, there is competition for resources and organizations operate in silos.

We are still operating within economic instability and uncertainty. There is a rising cost of doing business, regulatory constraints and shifting donor priorities as well as reduced donor funding. Organisations fear that reporting failure will result in being 'dropped' by donors. Sometimes there are weak organisational systems, limited risk management capacity, and inadequate accountability mechanisms.



4. Challenge Marketplace:

Identifying Collective Solutions



Rethinking Funding Relationships

- More unrestricted funding opportunities.
- Multi-year funding arrangements.
- Realistic budgeting processes.
- Adequate support for administration and operational costs.
- Reduced reporting burdens.
- Greater donor flexibility.
- More opportunities for collaborative funding.

A strong message from participants was the need for funders to listen more closely to implementation realities and invest in long-term organisational sustainability.



Strengthening Organisational Sustainability

- Developing social enterprises and income-generating initiatives.
- Diversifying funding sources.
- Strengthening fundraising capacity.
- Building relationships with private sector partners.
- Exploring partnerships with municipalities and industry associations.
- Investing in talent retention and organisational development.

While noting the work needed from the funders, participants also agreed that sustainability requires organisations to become less dependent on project funding alone.



Building a Culture of Collaboration

- Consortium-based approaches.
- Shared fundraising efforts.
- Peer learning networks.
- Shared compliance and audit support.
- Knowledge-sharing platforms.
- Deliberate trust-building initiatives.

There was broad agreement that collective action can increase efficiency, reduce duplication, and strengthen impact.

4. Challenge Marketplace:

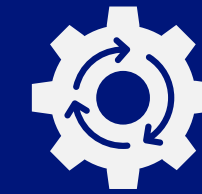
Identifying Collective Solutions



Investing in People and Wellbeing

- Leadership coaching and mentorship.
- Wellness programs and retreats.
- Supportive workplace cultures.
- Peer support networks.
- Realistic workloads and staffing structures.

Many participants noted that people are the most important resource within organisations and should be supported accordingly.



Strengthening Governance and Accountability

- Strengthen financial management and accountability.
- Enhance procurement and compliance.
- Improve Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems.
- Build stronger HR systems and staff capacity.
- Strengthen risk management, fraud prevention, and safeguarding (PSEA).

Participants also encouraged organisations to confidently decline funding opportunities that do not align with their mission or capacity.

5. Emerging Collaboration Opportunities

The following are areas identified where collaboration could be strengthened:

- Joint fundraising initiatives.
- Consortium development.
- Shared capacity-building programs.
- Peer learning and mentorship.
- Public-private partnerships.
- Technology and innovation partnerships.
- Community-driven development initiatives.



6. Key Messages from Participants



To Donors

- Listen to implementing organisations
- Invest in organisational sustainability, not only programmes
- Increase access to unrestricted, multi-year funding
- Support wellbeing and institutional strengthening
- Encourage collaboration rather than competition



To Implementing Organisations

- Strengthen governance and accountability systems
- Diversify income streams
- Invest in fundraising and sustainability planning
- Collaborate more intentionally
- Prioritise staff wellbeing



To the Ecosystem

- Communities must remain at the centre of development
- Trust is essential for meaningful collaboration
- Sustainable impact needs financial and institutional resilience
- Honest conversations create room for learning and change

7. Commitments **and Next Steps**

The event concluded with participants reflecting on lessons learned, identifying potential collaborations, and making commitments to future action.

-  Exploring new partnerships
-  Making introductions between organisations and funders
-  Applying lessons from peer experiences
-  Strengthening collaboration within the ecosystem
-  Continuing conversations initiated during the event

[Link to the event pictures:](#)



Snapshots



[Link to the album](#)



WITH GRATITUDE

Thank You

To Our Partners, Donors & Ecosystem Actors

We extend our sincere appreciation to all partners, donors, *entrepreneurs*, ecosystem actors, and guests who contributed to the success of the Zimbabwe Partner and Donor Showcasing and Networking Event.

Your openness, insights, and commitment to collaboration helped create a meaningful space for honest conversations, shared learning, and future action.

Special appreciation goes to AIDN for co-sponsoring the event and for its collaboration with the Funder Friends in Australia in supporting this important ecosystem-building initiative.

Together, we continue to strengthen partnerships that enable local innovation, impact, and sustainable change.