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DA Global. (2023). Framework to Decolonize Child and Youth Philanthropy. Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG)

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Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

2023



Intro

Acknowledgements

Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG) commissioned DA Global as an expert advisory engagement to support its network-wide efforts to identify colonial legacies and practices in child and youth philanthropy through collective learning and reflection, identify promising practices in decolonized grantmaking and shift practices across the network to support commitment to decolonial approaches.

Founded by Degan Ali – an internationally-renowned humanitarian leader and organizational development consultant with more than 20 years leading innovation in the sector – DA Global’s mission is to help organizations to reach the greatest possible impact they can for communities by actively modeling anti-racist and decolonized ways of working. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, DA includes a global team of associates, each with their own respective expertise in working to shift power and decolonize the international

system. DA Associates are largely from the Global South and have deep experience researching, critiquing, and working on issues across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. We would like to sincerely thank all of the ECFG members and partners who contributed to this work and acknowledge the critical contributions of the Decolonizing Philanthropy Working Group and Ramatu Bangura. In particular, we want to credit the consultant team: Elena Gillis, Isabella Jean, Ghazal Keshavarzian, and Shreya Sen.

About ECFG

Elevate Children Funders Group is the leading global network of funders focused exclusively on the well-being and rights of children and youth. We focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

We support children and youth by building a community of funders and creating spaces for:

- Greater learning and effectiveness in how we use our individual resources.
- More collaboration and alignment across our philanthropic strategies.
- Collective action for more and better funding, and support for our wider field.

funders and philanthropic advisors funding the wellbeing and rights of children and youth. Between 2011 and 2020, ECFG members contributed more than \$1.2 billion to children facing adversity.

ECFG works on the premise that we are “better together.” We believe our potential impact as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts and that together we can drive greater sustainable change than as individual foundations working alone.

Established in 2011, ECFG now counts 23 members, including many of the leading global

Additional thanks: We are deeply grateful for the guidance and support of the Advisory Group for this project, the Decolonizing Philanthropy Working Group, and the Secretariat team. Thank you also to those who generously went above and beyond to offer their time and expertise to the creation of this Framework: Krista Riddley, Kristen Woolf, Sarah Rank, Jessie Szopinski, Sadaf Shallwani, Dennis Arends, Lucie Corman, Sheela Bowler, and the Global Fund for Children team.



Navigating the Framework

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An Open Letter

From the Working Group

ECFG’s decolonizing child and youth philanthropy journey gained momentum in 2021 as we celebrated a decade of working within philanthropy to more effectively meet the needs of the world’s most marginalized and vulnerable children.

As our network reexamined and renewed our shared purpose, a new strategic direction emerged that is more responsive to complex and dynamic realities. Decolonizing child and youth philanthropy was identified as a core element to this strategy, as we know we cannot address the root causes of harm for children without challenging and transforming the underlying power dynamics, structures, and practices within philanthropy.

At its core, decolonizing philanthropy recognizes that traditional philanthropic practices have often been rooted in colonial ideologies and power structures, where decision-making and resource allocation have been concentrated in the hands of a few. This has resulted in a lack of agency and autonomy for marginalized communities, reinforcing paternalistic relationships and perpetuating inequities. Decolonization calls for a reevaluation of funding models to ensure that resources are distributed more equitably, addressing historical imbalances and providing support to communities most impacted by colonialism.

In 2022, ECFG commissioned Degan Ali and her team to lead us through a decolonizing grantmaking journey that included learning webinars, collective learning and reflection, the identification of promising practices, and the development of a framework that funders could use to elevate equitable grantmaking. After developing an understanding of our network’s needs and goals, our decolonizing philanthropy working group engaged in deep partnership design with DA Global to create The Decolonizing Child and Youth Philanthropy Framework.

This framework recognizes that our members and partners are at different stages of their journey in tackling colonialism within their organizations and grantmaking. While there are universally relevant lessons gained from existing decolonization efforts in the philanthropic and charity sectors, this framework is designed to support the different types, sizes and needs of the funders who belong to this group. This is not a magic solution, but a tool in our decolonizing child and youth philanthropy toolbox. This tool is intentionally focused on supporting those who have embarked on a change process within their organizations, those who want to make additional adjustments, and those who are grappling with how to get started.

The Decolonizing Child and Youth Philanthropy Framework aims to help us shift the power imbalances that exist between donors and their partners, as well as challenge the ways in which philanthropy has traditionally operated. We acknowledge that some of the insights and recommendations may make some of us uncomfortable. We invite you to be curious with yourself and embrace unlearning as well as reimagining what shifting power can and should look like.

This is just a beginning, we have so much good, important work to do together. We hope this framework helps you - and all of us - deepen the work. Stay connected. We are all in this together!

In solidarity,

Kristen Woolf
Kristen Woolf, EMpower, Co-chair

Andy
Krista Riddley, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Co-chair

Sheela Bowler
Sheela Bowler, ECFG Secretariat

on behalf of the ECFG Decolonizing Philanthropy Working Group & Secretariat team



Glossary

Terms to Understand

It is important to acknowledge the potential discomfort or resistance that some may feel towards the terms such as “decolonization” or “decolonial” and the critique of colonial legacies in philanthropy. The goal is not to rigidly adhere to a specific terminology, but rather to remain open and flexible in our approach to engaging in meaningful dialogue and taking action toward positive change. By encouraging – and not shutting down – reflection and discussion, we can work toward healing and rebuilding communities that have been affected by colonialism and power inequalities.

1

Adultism

is the combination of “behaviours and attitudes based on the assumptions that adults are better than young people and entitled to act upon young people without agreement (Bell, 1995). Adultism is an - often normalised and unconscious - form of discrimination against young people reinforced by social institutions, policies, laws, customs, and attitudes (ECFG). Adultism is built on the view that children cannot have individual subjectivity - which then condones the subordination and discrimination against young people.

2

Child Development

is a series of skills and stages that occur in a child between birth and adulthood. Domains of skills include motor, sensory, social, and cognitive. (Source: Yale University)

3

Child Protection

is the prevention and response to violence, exploitation, and abuse of children in all contexts. (Source: UNICEF)

4

Child Rights

are a subset of human rights with particular attention to the rights of protection and care afforded to minors. According to the UNCRC, children’s rights include their right to association with both parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for protection, food, education, health care, justice, civil liberties, and freedom from discrimination on the basis of the child’s race, gender, national origin, religion, disability, ethnicity, or other characteristics. (Source: UNCRC)

5

Child Well-Being

is multi-dimensional and includes dimensions of physical, emotional, and social wellbeing (e.g., poverty, quality of life, social exclusion, etc.). (Source: UNICEF)

6

Colonialism

The values, practices, policies and institutions that are continuations of historical social, economic and political imperialism. This includes Global North values, perspectives and structures being considered superior.

7

Decolonization

Resistance against colonial power and the shifting of power towards those who are colonized. At its core, decolonization works towards the autonomy and opportunity for self-determination. Decolonizing philanthropy is about righting historical wrongs by acknowledging and addressing the power imbalances and injustices, recognizing agency and dignity of communities, and shifting power from philanthropic organizations to communities that are impacted by systemic oppression and colonialism.

8

Intersectionality

The ways in which various forms of discrimination or disempowerment overlap and are felt by a person or group due to the variety of identities they hold, such as race, gender, age, class, nationality, education and legal status.

9

Inclusion

The act of bringing people who are typically excluded into activities and decision-making spaces in a way that recognizes and celebrates their differences.



10

Diversity

Includes all of the ways in which people differ, including the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Diversity recognizes that every person and group should be valued for their distinct ideas, perspectives and values. Diversity also includes recognition of differences in people's lived experiences.

11

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

is a period of rapid and critical development - from conception to 8 years. Quality nurturing care during this period - adequate nutrition, good health care, protection, play and early education - is vital for children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional development. (Source: INEE, UNICEF)

12

Equity

The idea of addressing structural factors that benefit some and harm others through recognition of their differences and what each requires to achieve the same goal or access the same opportunities. Equity often requires different approaches based on the needs and interests of each individual or group in ways that some interpret as unequal.

13

Marginalization

The process (intentional or unintentional) by which individuals and groups are pushed away from power and, due to norms and ideologies like racism or sexism, are deemed less valuable than those in power. Marginalization is not a lack of agency, but rather a social process that diminishes ways that agency can be used.

14

Paternalism

The limitation on freedom and autonomy of an individual or group made with the claim that it is for their benefit or to prevent harm.

15

Patriarchy

A system of oppression and exploitation in which those considered male in gender hold ultimate power, influence and control over those considered female in gender.

16

Violence Against Children

takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers. (Source: UNICEF, WHO)

17

White Supremacy Culture

The dominant, mainstream, and unquestioned cultural and societal practices that have evolved from historically European colonial history that center "white" culture, values, ways of thinking and behaving - and devalues those that are deemed to be different. White supremacy culture often operates in subtle ways by defending what is "normal" - or what is considered "professional", "right", "effective", or "successful."



The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

The Journey to Decolonization

Decolonizing philanthropy is a journey. There is no singular pathway to decolonize, as each journey is shaped by specific histories, relationships, and power dynamics of the organization and its stakeholders.

“There is a need for openness and empathy for individuals and organizations that are at different points of journey. **There needs to be a willingness to learn and consider change.** You are not behind or have failed. We need to be engaging everyone and inviting them into the conversations.”

The Framework highlights four key “models” along this journey - **colonial, incremental, shifting power, and decolonized** - that represent a spectrum of change. These models are categorized based on their ability to challenge power dynamics and systemic inequities between philanthropic organizations in the Global North and communities in the Global South. This spectrum and the necessary shifts in values, attitudes, and practices described below are also relevant to domestic philanthropy reflecting the persistent structural racism, inequities and injustices impacting historically marginalized communities.

- **Colonial** - Refers to philanthropy primarily driven by Global North actors and perspectives who hold the majority

of power, while local communities and partner organizations are seen as passive recipients or beneficiaries of assistance.

- **Incremental** - Recognizes the importance of local knowledge and expertise, but characterized by unequal and transactional relationships with grantees, one-sided exchanges, and often fails to challenge persistent power dynamics and structural inequities at levels required for meaningful change.
- **Shifting Power** - Power is shared more equally and there is a willingness to prioritize local leadership and agency - with the intention to address the root causes of systemic oppression and working toward greater equity and justice.
- **Decolonized** - Power is truly shared

and distributed equitably among all stakeholders with a focus on collaboration, partnership, and learning from local communities and partners - with a goal to interrupt persistent cycles of oppression, racism, adultism, discrimination and inequity.

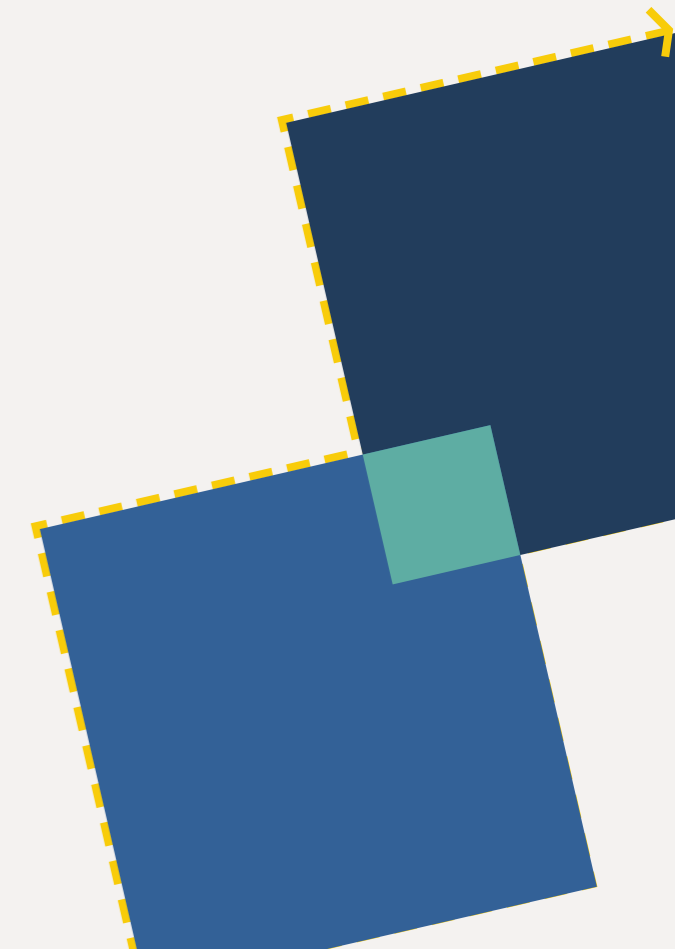
Before beginning this journey, it is important to note:

1. Every person, organization, and even department within an organization - is at a different stage in this journey. Each stage should be embraced and applauded.

starting at different parts of the organization, or defining new entry points.

5. It is likely that a single institution will have observable practices across multiple models of the journey. For instance, an institution can achieve progress and be seen as “shifting power” in some practices while also having practices that are considered “decolonized.”
6. There is no timeline to this change. This journey of transformation can be incremental for some and accelerated for others. The key is to keep moving towards decolonized philanthropy.

2. This journey is not linear. As an organization makes progress it will also face barriers or make mistakes along the way. Some organizations find they make progress in some areas, while failing in others at the same time. What is most important is the organization does not give up, but tries to find alternative solutions to achieve their decolonization goals.
3. There may be various and overlapping entry-points or pathways forward within the same organization. It is important to start somewhere and build from there.
4. There are multiple possible pathways to decolonization - as each organization must find what works best for them. This may mean using different terminology than what is listed in the framework,





The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

The Four Levels of Change

The framework demonstrates change across four levels – individual, relational, institutional, and ideological. Using these levels allows us to identify where problems arise and where solutions must take place.

In this framework, the four levels can be described:



In reality, these levels do not have clear lines separating them, however each provides a lens to identify where problems arise and solutions can take place. These levels are overlapping and effect change in the others. Because of the inherent overlap between the four levels, to reach decolonized philanthropy change must take place across all of the levels to be successful. For instance,

- A person’s assumptions about a context (individual) shapes the way they communicate with and treat an organization from that context (relational).
- Sometimes to find solutions to a lack of diversity in leadership (institutional), an organization will have to address the beliefs about what “leadership” looks like and acts like (ideological).

A note about interpreting the framework:

As stated, the framework is not designed to give concrete answers or clear “next steps” - because solutions look different for every person and organization. The framework is designed to guide the learning and reflection necessary to begin the decolonization process. This learning and reflection is supported in a few ways:



The framework uses three senses - look, sound, and feel - to describe how attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and structures appear in the work of a philanthropic organization. They can appear as overt actions or more nuanced behaviors, which are illustrated in the examples throughout.

The examples used, including in the Bright Horizons case study, represent experiences highlighted in desk research, concrete examples shared during key informant interviews, and first-hand experiences of the authoring team. While they do not represent any particular philanthropic organization, they are indicative of common practices in child and youth philanthropy.

It is important to note that the number and depth of examples given for “look, sound, and feel” sections lessen as one moves through the four models of the framework. This is representative of the reality in philanthropy today - as the authoring team only used concrete examples from interviews or first-hand experiences and practices for decolonization and shifting power are not common.



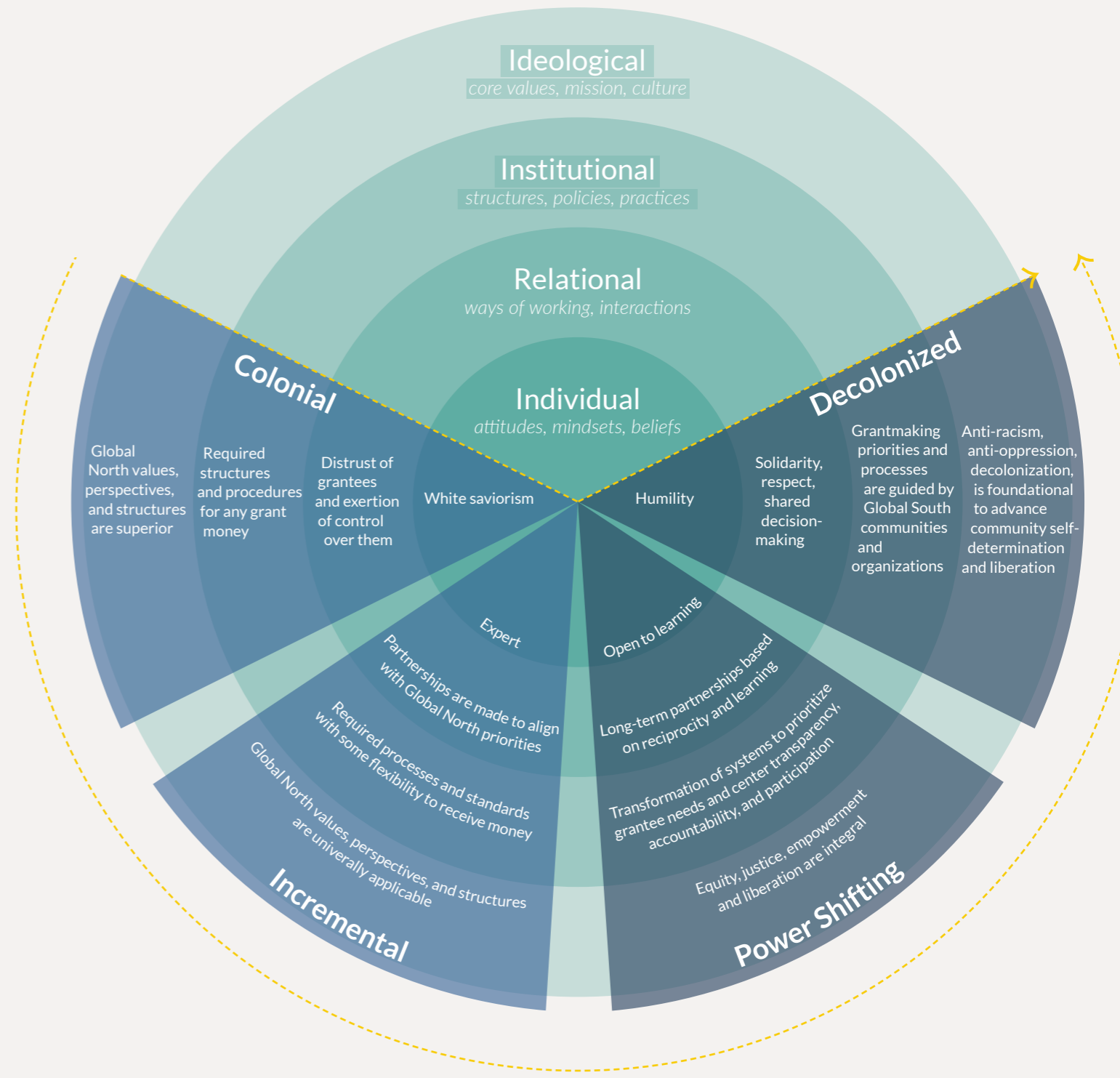
The selection of illustrative examples for inclusion in the 'look, sound, and feel' sections touches on many unwritten rules, implicit biases, unconscious racism and problematic statements, attitudes and practices. These are important to consider because implicit biases and subtle power dynamics are often masked by commonly accepted and politically correct statements which come across as well-intentioned and are often unchallenged.

In the [companion workbook](#), you'll find practical questions, activities, and resources to help you navigate the decolonizing philanthropy journey. There are three sections to the workbook:

- Reflection Questions meant to help consider ways the reader is contributing to the status quo and spur thinking about possible change.
- Activities for implementation intended to help you and your organization explore colonial legacies, challenge power imbalances, and cultivate more equitable relationships.
- Resource Guide that includes key articles, research papers, podcasts, tools and guidance materials to support continued reflection, planning, and implementation.

While the framework is as comprehensive as possible, it cannot be exhaustive. As organizations take steps to decolonize, they may be faced with situations that are not covered in this framework. In any case, what is most important is the commitment to humble self-reflection, honest dialogue, and building trust.

Decolonizing Child and Youth Philanthropy Framework



The journey from colonial... ..to decolonized philanthropy →

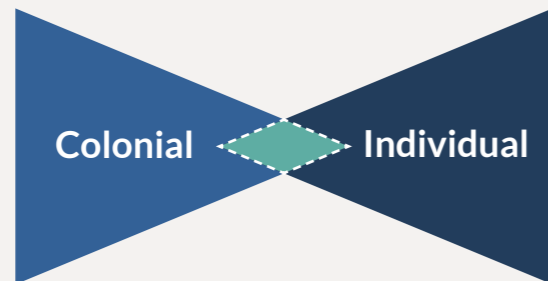


The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

Colonial Philanthropy

Colonial philanthropy is **driven primarily by Global North actors and perspectives who hold the majority of power.** In this model, local communities (including children, youth, and families) and partner organizations are seen as passive recipients or beneficiaries of assistance.

This model is rooted in colonialism, patriarchy, racism, paternalism, adultism, and classism. It upholds and reinforces existing inequities between those with a concentration of resources and power (who are primarily located in the Global North) and those in Global South communities who are engaged as local leaders, service providers, partners, and participants in direct service, social change, rights-based, and development processes.



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - have all the knowledge and expertise as well as authority and legitimacy needed to “save” children, youth, families, and communities in the Global South.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Individuals prioritize their personal interests and agendas. For example:

- A Board member tells leadership that they met the head of an organization while traveling in India and they want the philanthropy budget to fund it.
- A senior leadership team member has arranged for his high-school aged niece to do an internship with one of the grantee organizations in Guatemala because it would “look good on her college application” and for her to “experience poverty to appreciate the comfortable life that she leads.”

- Board members decide that the foundation no longer funds early childhood development since they “believe” that there is a lot of funding going towards that issue; even though the program team had mapped the gap in funding worldwide.

Grant Program officers, technical reviewers, or decision-makers are unaware of their individual biases, assumptions, and ideologies that affect their decision-making. For example:

- A program officer does not approve funding for a project designed by a girls-led organization that operates with volunteer time, because they assume the girls already have too many unpaid responsibilities and do not want to add to the gender inequality they face.
- A foundation launches a new program focused on girls recruited by armed forces in Nigeria and Sri Lanka. The program officer approves funding for programs focused on hairdressing and sewing skills since that is what she assumes to be the limited options for the girls from that community.

Individuals prioritize their own knowledge and experiences or those from the Global North as expertise, without considering alternative ways of thinking or doing. For example:

- A grant is not approved by the technical reviewer because they have never seen the approach to early childhood development being proposed, despite the proposal explaining that it is a traditional way of raising children in a multi-generational household in the community.
- A local organization that works with children living and working on the streets uses visual arts and storytelling (non-written) as a way to both engage and support the children but also to measure the success of its activities. Arts and storytelling have deep social, cultural and political roots in their community and allows people with disabilities to engage in the discussions. The philanthropic organization tells them the arts is not a strong metric for measurement and sends its logic framework and measurement and evaluation tools.



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

Sounds like

In conversation with a partner organization, a child-rights specialist alludes to traditional communal family relationships (such as elderly grandparents caring for the children) and child-rearing practices being harmful and violent by suggesting that the parenting program approach, rooted in the Western notions of the nuclear family, used by the specialist promotes "best practices" for raising children.

When describing a local partner to colleagues from another department, a program officer shares that it is common for girls in "that region," "that ethnic background" or "from that religion" to be "especially vulnerable" and more at risk of violence, lower education levels and unequal power relations.

After a youth-led partner organization presented how important sexual reproductive rights sessions are for their peers during the annual Board meeting, a Board member states that they should not have been funded because they focus on educating peers on sexual health and rights, which the member considers inappropriate for young people.

In a discussion about renewal of funds to a local partner, the program officer describes their own experience in visiting the community and shares that the children and families they met are "underserved" and would "continue to be vulnerable" without the foundation's support.

A gender technical specialist expresses concerns to a program officer about directly funding local partners because there is a risk "in that context" that the partner will reinforce gender inequalities in their programs.



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Leaders of local partners feel offended because they are told that their knowledge of their own community is not correct.

Young community leaders feel frustrated when the needs they express as a priority in their lives are considered too "mature" for them.

Mothers, fathers, grandparents and other caregivers in a community feel inadequate and confused when they are taught that their parenting or caregiving practices are harmful, and they reflect fondly on their own childhood experiencing the same parenting style.

Local organizations and leaders feel that these programs and frameworks oftentimes see their communities as not safe places for children to be raised in and view communities and parents as harmful to their children - encouraging child labor and low educational outcomes and forcing early marriage - rather than understanding what childhood and family means and it is different from where the foundation staff are coming from.

Community members feel that the foundations, which are supporting the international humanitarian aid structures, are defining who is inherently "good" and "bad"; and Western agencies upholding the "good" values and their community, particularly community organizations and children and young people are the bad ones and not upholding "democratic" values, morality, and norms are not warranted to the right for humanitarian aid and release the international actors from any forms of accountability.



Local governments, communities and community structures feel frustrated that their views are not taken into account in the drafting of their own child welfare or family laws, or determining what kind of violence they may deem as legitimate.

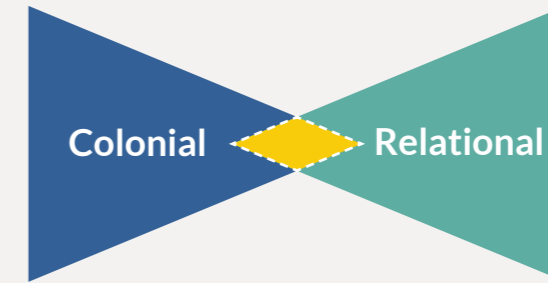
Girls and young women feel that they are being constructed and celebrated in individualized ways that disconnect them from both community networks and cultural lives.

Local organizations and communities feel that funders and programmers often do not acknowledge the important, complex and multifaceted roles of women in family and community life and funding may in fact be stripping them of their agency by conceiving them as powerless rather than empowering them.

“The narrative is that white people need to come and to save us from ourselves and our families. **It’s dehumanizing our heritage, our culture.** Sponsoring our children is pervasive. It’s not critical, it’s not part of any systematic transformation, any partnership with our communities, it was about extraction and exploitation. And that was the dominance of the children’s program – if it’s not adoption, its sponsorship, its homes for children, it’s everything to be honest that we are ashamed of but no one is talking about it.

They are all trying to tweak as they go and **pretend that half a century of harm did not happen and it was just an accident of history.** But it is not true that when it was happening that people were not critiquing it, there was an established set of critiques of what is wrong and harmful but we just chose to ignore it.”

- Interviewee



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - exercise power and control over our grantees, and by extension over the communities they serve and advocate for, because they cannot be trusted or do not have the capacity to know what is best for them.”



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Philanthropic institutions do not consult local partners or communities and relationships are transactional and top-down. For example:

- The terms and conditions of a new grant are written up by the philanthropy’s finance team and sent to local partners to sign, without a meeting to discuss the agreement or answer questions the local partner may have.
- A technical specialist from the United States delivers training for local partners in Guatemala based on research about dynamics in Mexico (because there are not a lot of credible sources about Guatemala), without considering consulting the local partners in Guatemala to ensure it was relevant before delivery.
- Foundation staff prioritize funding child welfare and child wellbeing mechanisms, packages, and interventions that were developed outside of the respective communities and local context.

Philanthropic institutions do not give directly to local organizations and when they do they only give restricted funds. For example:

- A philanthropy will only give large amounts of funding to international NGO that can regrant smaller amounts to local partners because they think this will avoid corruption at a local level. The regranting process can take months (and even years) for the receipt of funds resulting in disruption of organization operations and undue stress.



- A local partner submits a proposed budget outlining the real costs for the delivery of a project, including project personnel, transportation to/from their project site, project activities, and office utilities. The donor sends a budget approved for funding that has removed all budget items except the project activities.
- A grant is given to a local partner to fund short-term project activities tied to specific budget amounts and timelines. When the local partner asks if there can be more flexibility, they are told each adjustment to budgets will need to be justified and approved by the program officer, which further delays the receipt of funds.
- A philanthropy will only give money to registered organizations led by staff over 25 years of age, disqualifying most local organizations in a region, and disproportionality affects organizations led by women and young people.

Donors expect local partners to meet and follow global standards. For example:

- At the start of a new grant, the program team tells the local partner that there are global gender standards they must meet in their activities to receive funding - including that 50% of their program participants must be girls - despite the program being focused on supporting all children, including boys and LGBTI+ children, who have been exposed to violence and abuse.
- Donors expect organizations to use and uphold international terminologies, jargon and language (M&E, capacity building, case management, safeguarding, DEI), which means little in the local contexts.

Donors require heavy/lengthy monitoring and evaluation requirements to prove partners are delivering the project activities as funded. For example:

- Partners are expected to provide monthly reports on activities that include actual spending, participant numbers (sex and age disaggregated), and advancement towards the indicators listed in their program proposal. The reports are reviewed by the foundation staff and follow-up questions are asked which leads to more staff time devoted to reporting and potential delays in receiving subsequent payments. This pulls staff away from program activities and community engagement and relationship building.

- Funder requires all proposals to include detailed budget line items for project related activities and does not include any space in the proposal template to describe costs associated with staff development, institutional capacities strengthening or other unrestricted budget line items that could support the organization to expand its expertise and network.
- A staff member expresses concerns to the program officer because they are wary of direct funding to local partners because there is no oversight to ensure they are correctly incorporating women in their project. All new grants include three-day gender equality training in the start-up phase, during which partners are expected to have all staff attend.
- (See "Bright Horizons Case Study")



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

A local partner pushes back on a term in the grant agreement about monthly financial reporting, noting that they do not have the team capacity to deliver those terms. The program officer brings the issue to the decision-maker, reminding them that this partner is an important and deeply trusted actor in the community. The decision-maker does not allow for changes, stating "They need us more than we need them."

A technical specialist on a site visit expresses concern that the local partner has never had an expert review their case management guidance, stating that there must be a "technical review" to ensure their ways of working are "aligned with international best practice."

A program officer informs an international NGO that it will not support funding if they partner with a local community-based organization because they "have limited capacities", are unable to manage "day-to-day problems", and have "limited leadership skills."

A program officer informs a youth-led organization that funding is project-based; thus their outcome-orientated work to build the local constituencies of children and young people "does not meet the institutional requirements."



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Local partner leaders feel disempowered because they are told (explicitly or implicitly) that their project design is inadequate, their organization and staff are not worth investing in, and they need to prove their worth.

Local partner staff feel taken advantage of because they spend a full-time level of effort doing the work they believe in to support their communities being paid very little or not at all.

Local partner staff are nervous that they will be unemployed if the program does not receive funding in duly manner or after the one-year grant period.

Community members do not feel supported by the local partner and lose trust in the partner because the approaches they have started using in activities are not relevant to community members' lives (because they were designed in another context or by outsiders).

Local partner leaders feel inauthentic because they have to make so many concessions in their ways of working with the community to please the donor.

Local organizations and communities feel used and exploited by the foundations and partners and seen only as a means to extract more financial resources and attention by using their children's images and stories for their own benefit.

“Funding, what I’ve seen, is transactional in nature but **at the heart of what we are talking about is a relational issue and trust issue**. And young people see themselves as beneficiaries and not partners in the funding ecosystem.”

- Lakshitha Saji Prelis

Co-Chair, Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security and the Director, Children and Youth Programs, Search for Common Ground, Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute, Conversation #3

“One of the **key issues to understanding and reaching communities is to support local community organizations and movements**. The large international organizations (donors and INGOS) think that local community groups/organizations don't have the capacity and vision to fulfill the goals of supporting the well-being and rights of children. **If you are starting off at that point of thinking of them as less than then it's not an equitable funder-grantee relationship (built on equity, trust and dignity)**. This way of thinking impacts all aspects and way of working of a foundation (e.g., strategy of foundation, selection of grantee, grants management, etc.)”

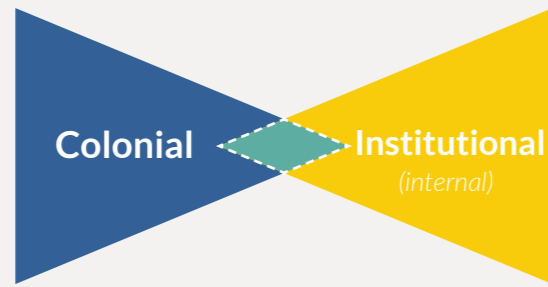
- Interviewee

Child and youth philanthropy can be even more problematic than wider philanthropy since power imbalances are further layered by intrinsic issues related to child rights, welfare, development, and protection policies, which are laden with paternalistic ideology about the ways that children should be raised and the ways that families and society should relate to one another. The fixed notions of childhood,

womanhood, motherhood, family, and community do not give room for local context and cultural differences - and the sector tends to impose a universal understanding of child protection, child rights, child development, and child welfare stemming from Western cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts and not applied flexibly to other contexts.

Resources: citations and opportunities for further learning

- Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute Conversation #2 and Briefing Paper #2; Conversation #5 and Briefing Paper #5 and Institute Report. All resources available here.
- Catherine Love, “Maori Perspectives on Collaboration and Colonization in Contemporary Aotearoa / New Zealand Child and Family Welfare Policies and Practices.” In Freymond, N., Cameron, G., eds. 2006. *Towards Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare: International Comparisons of Child Protection, Family Service, and Community Caring Systems*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto. 235-268 (2006)
- Heron Greenesmith, “Best Interests: How Child welfare Serves as a Tool of White Supremacy,” Political Research Associates,” (November 26, 2019) Available here.
- Alexander Krueger, Guy Thompstone and Vimala Crispin, *Learning from Protection Systems Mapping and Analysis in West Africa: Research and Policy Implications*. Available here.



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - believe that policies and processes based on Global North values and models provide the most effective approach for funding the needs of grantees and communities (including children, youth and families) in the Global South.”

“Where does it [colonialism] not show up? **It’s in the basic structures, practices, systems, procedures,** formal and informal.”

- Interviewee



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations are structured and governed in ways that maintain a top-down power inequality. For example:

- During their annual meeting, the Board makes decisions about the organization’s strategy, annual priorities, budget allocations and grantee selections with little or no input from program teams.

Philanthropic organization’s policies formalize these power inequalities. For example:

- Potential grantees must undergo a detailed due diligence and risk assessment review process that are in line with the foundation’s legal and financial requirements and have little flexibility and understanding of the differences between country settings.
- Quarterly financial reports use top-down and extractive models of management, with little to no flexibility and understanding of grantees capacity, and require all materials to be submitted in the English language.
- (See the “Bright Horizons Case Study”)



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

Philanthropic organization policies and processes are inflexible. For example:

- In reviewing proposals for funding submitted from organizations all over the world, decision-makers use a check-list or grading system to rank program proposals in comparison to one-size-fits-all standards that ignore the complexities and dynamics in each context.

Philanthropic organizations are homogenous with little diversity and do not represent the communities they are meant to support. For example:

- When reviewing candidates for positions, hiring managers are told to prioritize candidates with Master’s Degrees from “accredited universities”. Final candidates are predominantly from the Global North and from a common socioeconomic class - limiting the diversity of perspectives on teams and actual lived experience and ensuring confirmation bias in decision-making processes.

Philanthropic organizations define success based on Northern metrics that do not value diverse forms of knowledge and perspectives. For example:

- The metrics for measurement are often narrowly defined, based on quantitative not qualitative, and can feel exclusionary because some impact may not be “quantifiable” and hence less valued according to these metrics.

The week after the Board makes decisions about organizational priorities and strategy, all staff receive an organization-wide email that includes a video of the CEO announcing “the Board’s vision” for “our future” and summarizes the decisions with no explanation about how they were made. There are no methods to ask questions or give feedback.



During a panel interview of a final candidate who is from Thailand, has a PhD from a national university, and has over ten years of relevant experience, the hiring manager asks the candidate to pronounce the university's name and then responds "I've never heard of it."

A woman who was raised in foster care and received a Bachelor's degree from a local community college applied for a Program Officer position focused on children's care. Despite the fact that the job description calls for relevant experience, her lived experience is not seen as sufficient to be shortlisted. The hiring panel shortlists only people that meet the foundation's stated "educational standards and work experience."

A former LGBTI+ youth activist applied for a program administration position but is not short-listed since the foundation does not believe activism is a qualification.

When a local partner asks for a grant agreement to be translated to Spanish so their staff can understand it, the program officer explains that they do not have anyone on the team that knows Spanish and they do not have funds to pay for translation.

The global director of HR is questioned about why expatriate contracts make more money and have additional benefits than a local contract in the same country with the same level position. The director of HR explains that because "our American staff" that live abroad are "making significant changes to their lifestyles" and the organization must "account for" this.



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel destitute because they are unable to access funds if their project activities do not fit into the philanthropy's standards.

Job candidates from the Global South or those with lived experiences feel unrecognized and disrespected because their knowledge and experience is not appreciated by the hiring manager.

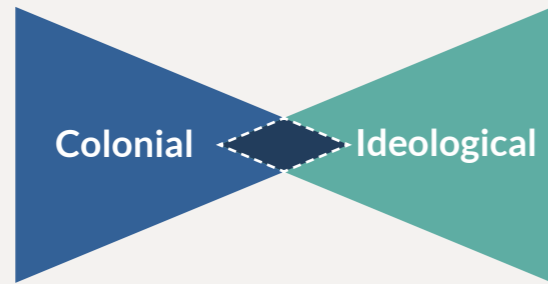
Program staff feel disenfranchised because they were unable to voice their perspectives about organizational and community priorities, despite being the closest to their local partners.

"Decision making is opaque. It is generally a top-down structure. **In practice it is top-down even if it is described as something else.** Behind closed doors with the CEO and the Chair – the higher order decision sits in the foundation. The grantmaking practice almost feels different in some ways from that."

- Interviewee

"What is expertise? How do you value lived experience? Do you pay for lived experience? Do you pay them fairly? Who speaks on behalf of your organization? **Understanding who is an expert, who is an expat, who is national is a product of racist past.** If your analysis does not include that, your efforts will be ultimately short."

- Interviewee



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - are rightfully placed in a position of power over grantees and communities in the Global South because our values are superior and universally applicable.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations consider themselves to be apolitical.

For example:

- Child and youth philanthropy lacks political framing or political consciousness and completely omits it from funding objectives and discussions on how to protect children and families and views children and young people as de-political agents.
- To avoid addressing geopolitics, donors attempt to use technical jargon and approaches, when in fact the politics are embedded in the programs and political consciousness are part of the children and young people’s lives.
- Lack of constituency, political framing, and political engagement makes it difficult to engage in political, radical, and constructive discussions around power imbalances and movement building.

Philanthropic organizations amplify Western norms and approaches as best.

For example:

- The organization releases a guidance document and toolkit written by a group of expert technical consultants focused on livelihood development and vocational training for youth. The guidance states that young people under the age of 16 should not be allowed to work or it is considered “child labor,” without recognition or discussion about how in some contexts it is the norm for young people to work to support their families as well as go to school.
- Philanthropists prioritize and impose programmatic child welfare models from high-income countries in other settings around the world. This is perceived as external imposition which mirrors colonial legacies and ongoing geopolitical power dynamics.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

Philanthropic organizations represent the communities they fund as vulnerable and needing saving. For example:

- The philanthropic organization holds an annual gala to fundraise for their efforts and invites hundreds of wealthy and famous people from the United States. During the gala, they ask a leader of a local partner organization to make a speech about their community’s poverty, show photos of the “beneficiaries”, and how the funding received from the philanthropy has improved lives.
- The philanthropic organization website’s homepage shows photos of children and families from the countries where it funds programs, as either “sad and helpless” indicating their need of support and protection or as smiling, especially when engaged in funded program activities, exemplifying the support that the foundation has provided them.

A post on the philanthropy’s instagram includes a photo of a well-known celebrity pointing at a world map at the front of a classroom in Cambodia. The caption says “growing global citizens.”

On the philanthropic organization’s website, it states its mission “to save” is rooted in the “Christian values” of compassion, integrity, and generosity.

A philanthropist that is working in conflict affected regions says its violence prevention programming is purely technical, rather than acknowledging that political violence is in fact the main factor rendering children and families vulnerable.



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Leaders of a youth-led organization feel disempowered because they risk funding from the philanthropy if they publicly support a young candidate that represents their interests in the next election.



Women and girls feel stereotyped and misunderstood when their goals are simplified to technical issue areas and they are represented as only needy survivors of violence; rather than political actors in their own right.

Local partner leaders feel that they must conform to Western standards of leadership to be seen as credible and worthy of funding.

Local organizations feel that they have to adapt their language and way of working to reflect the way the donors define success by using common jargon, words and metrics such as “efficiency,” “scale,” “innovation,” and “capacity building.”

“**Every major social movement that we lift up has been led by young people.** Literally their bodies. We never feel that young people can be trusted [to do] that work. Expectation is for them to show up. Somehow there are always activists in training. Not activists. Somehow will squander resources. Will make foolhardy decisions, not smart decisions. Excuse for never funding. **Only subjects of work, not as agents of work.** Only acted upon. It’s our fantasy about childhood that is intense. If they are involved in movement, they are not children or young people. **We talk about them as activists then they are not considered as children who need protection and safety** but by being activists, they have given up their childhood.”

- Interviewee

“The problem is that agencies doing this work are not political enough. **They’re not willing to acknowledge the politics that they’re engaged with...** It reflects the disciplinary background of child protection as a professionalized field amongst disciplines that are not good on politics... But it’s also to do with the timidity of organizations that don’t want to acknowledge the very contested political terrains in which they work. **They want to act as if this is a technical and that’s where a kind of avoiding is by framing the whole thing as a technical exercise, rather than a profoundly political one.**”

- Dr. Jason Hart

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social and Policy Sciences, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath, Reconstructing Children’s Rights Institute, Conversation #2

“When I first started, we went to a local community in Uganda. We were talking with local community organizations about how they [the donor] can support the organization. **They said that when outside organizations come in and they talk about children’s rights they don’t understand our realities here.** Children grow and develop working in the farm – the local economies depend on it. For them, it’s not “child labor” – they are working and love it. They are working and going to school. **For the children, both work and growing up are their realities.** Please understand our realities. These children are not being “abused” but are going to school, learning, and yes working for their families and the schools are structured to allow for that.”

- Interviewee



Illustrative Case Study

Bright Horizons: Colonial

The Bright Horizons case study is the story of a fictional foundation as they **move along the journey towards decolonization.**

While this is not a real foundation, many of the practices are based on well-documented practices common in philanthropy today. As a reminder, while this story shows the difference between each model along the framework, in reality organizations will often exist across different levels and the journey is not linear in the same way that is described by the study.

Founded in 1990, Bright Horizons Foundation is a private philanthropic foundation headquartered in New York (USA) and with a Europe-based office in Brussels, Belgium. The foundation's mission, strategy and grantmaking priorities are set by a 12-person Board composed of finance, law, business, and general international development academics from North America, United Kingdom and Europe. The Board meets quarterly in person in either New York or Brussels and each member is required to contribute \$10,000 annually. The fifty-person foundation staff manages and administers the grantmaking and is led by a New York-based CEO. The team is composed of business, finance, and children and youth sector experts drawn from elite graduate universities.

Bright Horizons is "committed to a world in which children and young people are free from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect." Bright Horizons first began its grantmaking to support orphans and vulnerable children in East and West Africa, and its first grant was to open an orphanage and school for vulnerable children in Ghana as well as an accompanying child sponsorship program. Since 1990, best practices in the sector have changed and prompted Bright Horizons to shift its approach away from institutionalization and child sponsorship but is committed to investing in children and families. Now it funds programming related to ending early marriage and child labor, family separation, early childhood development, among other issue areas defined as important by the international frameworks and expertise.

Bright Horizons funds in 20 countries across East and West Africa and South and Southeast Asia, with an annual budget of \$40 million. The funding is restricted, typically 12–36-month timeframe, and administered via project grants. Annually, Bright Horizons issues a Request for Proposals (RFP), by posting it on the foundation's website, sharing it via broader sector listservs and online platforms, or directly inviting selected organizations to apply for grants. The organizations (potential grantees) must be led by adults, with an annual budget of \$1 million or more. The RFP asks for clear articulation of the program's proposed theory of change, activities to support beneficiaries, a researching learning agenda, risk analysis framework, specific timelines, and a monitoring and evaluation log frame. The RFP has defined technical criteria, including the proposal must be 30,000 characters or less, and submitted via

a high-security online portal. Most proposals are submitted by large international non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, and academic institutions in the Global North. While it is open to all applicants, smaller organizations often do not have the capacity to meet short timelines, the technical and language skills required, or the internet bandwidth necessary to connect to the online portal.

The grantmaking team reviews proposals to identify those that meet the review criteria and make recommendations to the Board members, who will make final funding decisions. When awarded, the grantmaking team sends congratulatory emails to the organizations and explains the detailed due diligence and risk assessment review process that must be done before disbursement. While Bright Horizons awards grants to small or local organizations, often they are disqualified for funding during the due diligence process - deemed as too risky an investment for the foundation. Usually Bright Horizons administers grants to large international non-governmental organizations, UN agencies or academic institutions that are able to meet the specific technical, financial, and legal requirements.

Once the organization has been cleared, a grant agreement is drawn up by Bright Horizons legal department, based on US and/or European tax law. The grant agreement is made between the foundation and the grant recipient and outlines the compliance, legal and financial requirements both parties are expected to uphold - including that the recipient must adhere to all Bright Horizons human resource protocols and agree that Bright Horizons is the sole owner of intellectual property rights. It also stipulates that at any time during the duration of the grant, Bright Horizons can decide to withdraw the grant and stop disbursement of funds if they feel that the project is not meeting the intended objectives, deemed too risky to continue, or the strategy of the foundation shifts within short period of time.

The grantees submit financial reports quarterly and narrative reports every six months. All reports and accompanying written materials are only acceptable in the English language and funds are distributed based on the grantee meeting these reporting standards. The quarterly financial report requires excel-based documentation of detailed categorization of expenditures and receipts of all expenses. The narrative report is separated into specific sections, each with a set word limit, that require detailed information about how the project is meeting its objectives. The narrative document also requires reporting on the log frame targets that includes the number of beneficiaries reached, and it is recommended to include photos of the beneficiaries or program activities.

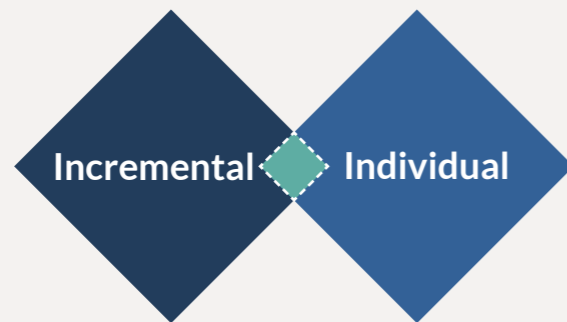
The grantmaking team also visits the grantee two times per year to observe the program progress and suggest ways that the grantee can improve. In an effort to ensure Board members feel connected to the grantees, at least one Board member joins during these visits. The visits tend to be short and formal - with little time focused on creating dialogue between Bright Horizons representatives and beneficiaries of the grant. These visits can be expensive for the grantee, who wants to impress Bright Horizons and ensure they are comfortable.



The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

Incremental Philanthropy

Incremental philanthropy recognizes the **importance of local knowledge and expertise, but power is still primarily held by actors and perspectives of the Global North.** It is characterized by unequal and transactional relationships with grantees, one-sided exchanges, and often fails to challenge existing power dynamics and structural inequities.



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - value local knowledge and expertise, but it is still important to focus on our own ideas and priorities.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Individuals are more aware of their biases and seek alternative perspectives, but continue to consider themselves superior. For example:

- A decision-maker asks a regional officer for their contextual knowledge and review of a proposal to assess the applying organization’s approach, because it does not quite align with technical best-practices that they weigh heavily when choosing programs to fund. The regional officer confirms that the approach being proposed is the correct one to take, especially because the “best practices” often are not successful in that context. In the end, the decision-maker chooses not to approve the program for funding because it is not in line with their technical standards.

Individuals seek feedback on their work and attitudes, but do not change behaviors. For example:

- During a meeting with a partner organization, a program officer asks for input on the ways that they can improve - as an individual - in supporting the partner. The partner gives their feedback to the program officer and notes that it was the same input they gave a year before. The program officer does not remember receiving that specific feedback.

Individuals understand local leadership is important and perhaps advocate for localization, but do not step up to change practices in their or their organization’s work. For example:

- During a panel interview about localization during an annual sector-wide event, the president of a philanthropic organization talks about the commitment that the organization has to fund local leadership. When questioned about ways their organization has changed its practices to support localization, the president explains that it is a hard journey because there are many pieces to get correct with many different actors to convince.
- In their new strategy, a foundation includes language about the importance of localization and ensuring a certain percentage of their funding goes directly to local organizations. However, the application and reporting processes, mechanisms and requirements have not been reformed to allow for most local organizations to apply.

Individuals listen to local partners’ knowledge and input, but do not credit them for their work. For example:

- A technical specialist is responsible for designing a new toolkit for partners, and goes through a process of consulting local partner organizations while building out the guidance. When the toolkit is produced, the technical specialist uses examples of best practices discovered during the consultations, but does not credit the local partner organizations for their work.



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

Sounds like

A program officer has been asked by a long-time partner for an extension on the proposal submission and they tell the partner that it is not possible because the officer "is held personally responsible" for "delivering funding on a specific timeline."

A leader of the philanthropic organization giving to emergency response programs is being interviewed on a popular podcast. The host asks about why the organization's funding to local partners is only 3% of their funding, despite the organization having a commitment to localization. The leader responds that they "understand local leadership is important" but that it is often hard to "realize" in "difficult contexts" that the organization funds.

During a review of a local partner's annual report, the technical specialist leaves a comment on the document that questions why they chose to implement a certain activity "despite prior advice" from the technical specialist that it was not "considered effective or an efficient use of money."

During a third-party monitoring and evaluation process, the international consultant hired by the philanthropic organization seeks local community feedback about the program. When specific feedback is given that the menstrual kits being supplied do not have the appropriate materials and pleads with the consultant to make that simple change, the consultant responds that they understand it is an improvement that must be made, but that they can "only give recommendations" and they "cannot make decisions" about the program.



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

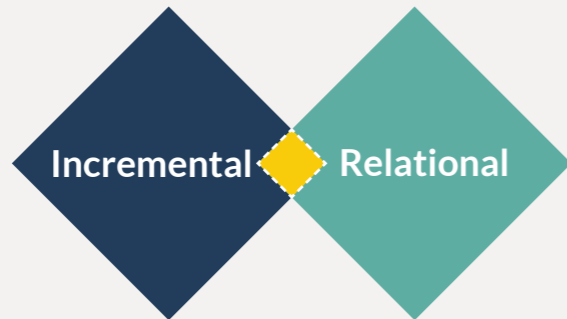
A finance officer is training a new colleague in the internal processes for reviewing and approving partner organizations for funding. The new colleague is curious about how often local organizations are approved for funding, and the finance officer explains that "I want to approve them," but if something were to "go badly" they would be "held accountable". The finance officer advises the new colleague to "play it safe" when choosing which organizations to approve.

The local partner leader feels optimistic that their opinion will be valued and respected, but is disappointed and betrayed when the program officer does the opposite of what the local leader suggested.

A local community member is exhausted and frustrated by participating in focus group discussions for their feedback on programs but never sees changes to the programs or in the community.

A youth refugee activist is flown around the world to present at high-level global meetings but they have to conform to the de-politicized ways of presenting and sharing about accomplishments, which they feel undermines their agency and value.

After being told that violence prevention foundation now supports localization, a local organization working on community reconciliation decides to apply for funds. Half way through the process the organization team gives up since the proposal language, requirements and structures are still geared towards an international organization.



We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - try to establish partnerships and engage with local groups and communities, if such alliances align with our goals and objectives.



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations staff control the ways in which local communities and partners give their feedback that reinforce the top-down power dynamic. For example:

- During an organizational strategy reset process, the philanthropic organization makes efforts to get feedback from local communities supported by the organization. They send a global feedback survey to all partner organizations to conduct with their communities. The survey is multiple choice and has no areas for open answers or additional feedback.
- Before an annual Board meeting, the president of the philanthropy tells program officers that it would be helpful to have local partners give testimonies about how direct and flexible funding from the organization has improved their operations. Program officers ask leaders of partner organizations to email short messages so the president can read them to the Board, rather than inviting partner organizations physically or by web call to the meeting. Meanwhile, the program team compiles take-aways from recent program reports, instead of asking the partner to highlight the successes they find most important.
- Program staff invite children and young leaders to engage in community workshops to help inform their grantmaking priorities but the participation is tokenistic, not necessarily “safe”, and tailored to fit the objectives of the foundation, rather than young people’s objectives and sense of safety and well-being.

Funding is given directly to local organizations with some long-term and flexible agreements if the partner can comply with the funder’s requirements. For example:

- A local partner has been offered a two-year core funding agreement that will allow the organization to pay salaries of their key personnel and invest in an office space. In order to receive the funds, the partner is required to submit financial statements or audits from the last three fiscal years, provide their operational policies related to anti-corruption, anti-harassment, gender equality, and safeguarding procedures. After submitting all required documentation the partner is told that their program will be funded, if the finance staff takes a training offered by the philanthropy. The local partner does not have a finance department or finance staff, so it is expected that the director of the partner organization attends.
- A program team chooses to fund a youth-led organization to support their national advocacy about LGBTI+ rights. In the compliance assessment and review of the partner, it is flagged that the organization has posted on social media about the importance of safe access to abortion care for youth and has started to fundraise for a health center that will provide these services. The philanthropic organization explains to the partner that they will give funds “earmarked” for certain program activities.

Philanthropic organizations represent the success of their partners’ programs as a result of their funding. For example:

- In their annual report, the philanthropic organization features some of their local partner organizations. The feature talks about success the partner has had in the program being funded, but does not recognize or describe the partner organization’s two decades of experience working in the community and global recognition for several of their innovative approaches.



Local partners are not considered experts, despite philanthropic organizations' seeking their input to make decisions. For example:

- Capacity “building” activities are scheduled and developed with local partner input but there is no effort to co-facilitate with local experts or to support South to South exchange of expertise.
- Local partners are asked to provide (for free/unremunerated) extensive input and participate in lengthy calls related to localization and shifting power to local actors as part of a Northern led research and guidance development process, but their concerns and requests related to equitable partnership principles remain unresolved.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

A program team sends their partner organization leadership an agenda for their bi-annual meeting without asking for their input. When the local partner suggests another point to add to the agenda, the program officer responds that they will “do their best” to incorporate the points into other parts of the meeting because it is a “full agenda.”

The president of a philanthropic organization asks one of their “most successful” local partners to record a video about their program and the organization’s contribution. The president tells the partner leader that they are asking “for strategic reasons” and hope that these messages will “convince” Board members about the importance of localization.

In feedback to a proposal, a program officer expresses they are excited about giving \$1 Million over two years in core funds for the program, but “cannot approve that” until the partner adjusts the theory of change to “align with the philanthropy’s strategic priorities.”



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Local partners recognize that this philanthropic organization is better than others, but feel that their partnership is inauthentic.

Local partners feel resentful because their efforts and innovation are being recognized and credited as the donor’s success.

Local partners feel proud to represent their community, but frustrated in the restrictions of how they do so.

Local communities feel that some of their needs are being met, but are disappointed that programs do not respond to the more entrenched issues impacting children and families that they raised during interviews.

Local partners feel resentful since they are used by the philanthropic organization as an example of local female leadership and their local giving and sustainability model; but in reality the partner is struggling to receive core (overhead) funding to keep their organization afloat.

“Capacity building is always one directional and anything that comes towards Global North is patronizing – “please teach us” – way we say to children. **We want to hear from you.** We don’t want to unseat any power but want to hear from you.”

- Interviewee



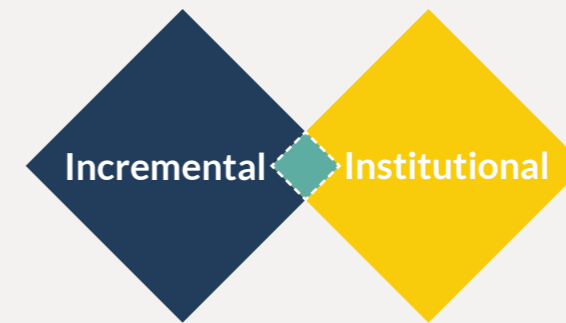
“People always ask us,” Oh, what are the risks”? But **we know that it’s more risky for them not to have the money than to have the money.** Even the instinct to think about risks are things that have been taught and we have been tricked into believing. Black and brown people having access to money is somehow risky and we need to put mechanisms in place, but white people and rich people having money is nothing wrong with it, so we push back.”

- Interviewee

The ELMA Community Grants Program

In Africa, particularly in rural areas, community-based organizations are often the only safety net for marginalized and vulnerable children. The ELMA Community Grants Program provides grants, mostly in the form of general support, to child-focused community-based organizations in Southern and Eastern Africa. The services provided by grantees in The ELMA Community Grants Program provide for essential needs of children – both physiological (e.g. food, water, clothing, shelter) and safety (e.g. protection, psycho-social support, health) – especially for those in vulnerable circumstances, from children with disabilities to unaccompanied minors crossing country borders. In addition to ELMA’s financial investments, certain grantees supported by The ELMA Community Grants Program receive tailored support to assist their learning and capacity in the areas of fundraising, financial management, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, and program development. Recently Masana wa Afrika was established as a new foundation spun-out from The ELMA Community Grants Program.

Elma Community Partners in 13 African countries can be found here:
www.elmaphilanthropies.org/elma/community-grants



“We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - expect local organizations to adapt to our models of operation but provide some flexibility to accommodate local contexts and needs.”



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

High-level governance and strategic decisions are top-down, but are informed by input from organization staff and partners. For example:

- During the strategy reset process, a philanthropic organization hires an external consultant to conduct a partner organization survey and interview process to get their perspective on priorities for the organization. The consultant interviews 10 partners (of the 100 the organization has globally) and gives recommendations related to five key areas in a 35-page document. The leadership team and Board reads the document as a part of their pre-reading ahead of their strategic planning workshop.

Philanthropic organizations policies are adaptable to support funding directly to local partners but sideline “nontraditional” organizations.

For example:

- A philanthropic organization’s policies state that partner organizations must be formally registered in the country they are operating, which often effectively disqualifies organizations led by youth under the age of 18, those representing marginalized groups like women, ethnic minorities or LGBTI+, and those that are run by two or three volunteers in a community.



Philanthropic organizations are focused on diversifying their teams, but there is little attention to equitable transitions or inclusion of diverse voices at decision-making levels. For example:

- The organization makes a five-year commitment to “nationalize” all global offices by transitioning all country-level positions to local contracts and requiring current expatriate staff in those roles to train members of their team for promotion. While this provides growth opportunities for national staff, local contracts are not provided with equal salary or benefits that are currently given to expatriate staff and the “savings” will go back to headquarters unrestricted funding pools rather than creating equitable salary and benefits scales for the country team.
- An organization appoints an African CEO but the Board continues to be led by entirely European and North American experts and the CEO is limited in carrying out her vision; thus the changes have become more cosmetic rather than addressing how power is manifested within the organization.

Philanthropic organizations are investing in diversity, equity and inclusion, but it is not done with a global focus. For example:

- The philanthropic organization is implementing DEI exercises across its regional offices in Asia and Latin America but the exercises have not been introduced or adapted to fit different contexts and does not allow the time and space for the regional office staff to contextualize the discussion, and to adapt and reframe the DEI framework within their local contexts.

Philanthropic organizations are structured in more horizontal ways, but are siloed across different departments with little collaboration across the organization. For example:

- The philanthropic organization gives grants in three sectors - children and youth rights, women’s rights and education (child/youth protection, education, and gender equality). When a local education-focused partner wants to start a new program focused on LGBTI+ children and youth rights, they do not know which team to talk to about potential funding. When they approach the education program officer they are told that it is a child/youth rights issue. When they approach the child/youth rights team, they are directed to the women’s rights team.

- A local organization is implementing a program addressing sexual exploitation. The program is taking an intersectoral approach (education, violence prevention, health services, livelihoods and cash assistance) to meet the needs of all children, including boys and LGBTI+ children and youth. They approach a donor but they are only able to support girls and education since this will sit in their gender-based violence and girls education portfolio.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

A long-time country office director of a philanthropic organization has been promoted to a global leadership position in the organization’s effort to diversify. During leadership meetings, they share input and suggest solutions based on their experience “in-country.” The others thank them for their input but express that the solution may have worked in “that context,” but the organization must make decisions with a “global perspective.”

When reviewing a local youth-led organization that started only one year prior, the finance officer declines the partner for funding because it does not have existing annual financial reports. When questioned about ways to get around the requirement for this partner the finance officer explains that the organization must “maintain standards” and cannot “make exceptions” because it is not “fair” to other partners.



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel resentful because they are not receiving funds to do more impactful work than the international non-profits in the same context.



Local partner leaders are overwhelmed by the amount of effort and time that philanthropic organizations' compliance and due diligence documentation requires of them.

Local partner staff are stretched thin across their responsibilities to deliver impactful programs and support their community members while also meeting the quarterly reporting requirements.

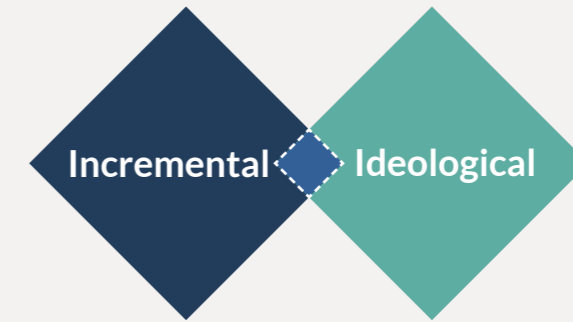
Youth, marginalized groups, and people represented by small or unregistered organizations feel unsupported and disenfranchised by international organizations that list them as "priorities" on their website.

Local partners feel that "diversity" language is just performative and yet another example of buzzwords having little meaning locally.

"[Within grantmaking] we have a lot of assumptions about what's required legally that is not required, it is a custom. These are **lots of customs in philanthropy and in the INGO sector that we have taken on as law that are not law.** So, I think there has to be a reckoning and questioning of all of these rules and policies that we put in place... and embedded in the idea is that we don't trust the people that are getting the resources. So, **many of the 'customs' are colonial and racist because it is the assumption that certain people, Black and Brown people, are not to be trusted with money, and so we have to create rules and barriers...** to keep resources away from Black and Brown folks... Customs that we have put in place because of distrust."

- Dr. Ramatu Bangura

Conversation #3 (Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute)



"We - as global north philanthropists or those who work with them - recognize and respect local culture and values but center our values because they are universally applicable."



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Philanthropic organizations may fund more local partners directly, but they will not fund issues or organizations that are considered political.

For example:

- In response to a local partner's proposal for building latrines at schools, a program officer advises them to change language that refers to girls' rights and instead frame the program as relating to menstrual health instead, because a technical proposal is more likely to be funded than something considered political.
- While philanthropists have a long history in funding reintegration of former child soldier programming, they will not fund programs linked to children associated with ISIS since it is "too politically sensitive" or "not appropriate".
- A US-based foundation is funding violence prevention programming for children and women in Afghanistan but will not fund any aspects that respond to the impact of political violence, including violence perpetrated by the United States armed forces on Afghan communities.



Funding is directed to solve popular (of the moment) global social issues, despite local actors' expressed priorities. For example:

- A foundation's annual funding priorities are defined by the family members, who are interested in eradicating girls' inequality by providing girls' education programs in all countries they give funding to. This is despite the input from one of the country teams that girls' education rates are much higher than boys' in that context, and funding would be better used to promote safe livelihood options for boys to combat the high rates of dropouts to join gangs.
- One of the donors of the foundation has flagged early marriage is a key priority for Syrian refugees living in Jordan and Lebanon. The foundation's long-term grantee in Jordan has told them early marriage is not a priority but lack of employment opportunities for young women and boys and requested if the funds can be redirected.

Philanthropic organizations assume that their values are universal.

For example:

- A foundation strategy is informed only by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) since it is perceived as universally accepted. Local organizations in West Africa have concerns regarding this framing and its universal applicability and feel dismayed that there has been little dialogue about this with local experts.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

When questioned about a new priority for funding, the president of the philanthropic organization explains that they must "stay neutral" and not get "wrapped up in the 'global culture wars' that push "political agendas."

During a meeting with a local partner, a program officer explains that they must change language in their proposal for funding because the language is "too political" and the philanthropic organization will not fund a program that "does not uphold its values."

A technical specialist provides feedback on a local partner's annual report, writing that while there may be "contextual or community relevance" of the outcomes of their activities, they cannot use these as "global learnings" about how to "truly make progress" in a community.



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local actors feel belittled and disrespected because their work is viewed in comparison to others, rather than standing on its own.

Community members feel misunderstood and imposed upon.

Community members feel that "Western" values, beliefs, conceptions of childhood and family are better than theirs.



“A full child rights-based approach would have **authentic relationships and people with lived experiences**. Looking at a rights-based approach for children rights, we also need to look at it in the overall social justice field- addressing patriarchy, exploitation, capitalism. **It’s a politicized agenda**. Sometimes the child rights field side steps that politicization.”

- Interviewee

“There are Program Officers that are fighting the good fight but then there are people who aren’t. Perfectly content to follow all the rules and follow all the guidelines – white supremacist, global north power. **They don’t take the time to question**. They don’t sit down with their grantees so they can craft their message and get the money.”

- Interviewee

In Latin and Central America, for the last fifty-plus years, socio-economic and political uprisings have been instigated and led by child and youth activists and youth-led movements. However, in the name of support, international aid and international cooperation organizations in the region have tried to control the youth movements and, in turn, international child rights or protection work has been centered around civil society and rooted in a de-politicized “protection” discourse. Rather than centering children and youth-led movements, they have been marginalized and dismissed within the broader international children’s rights/protection sector. (Key Informant Interview and see resource below).

Resources: citations and opportunities for further learning

- Jessica K. Taft (October 10, 2017), “Continually Redefining Protagonismo: The Peruvian Movement of Working Children and Political Change, 1976-2015” Latin America Perspectives Volume 46: Issue 5 pp 90-110.

Illustrative Case Study
 Bright Horizons: Incremental

The Bright Horizons case study is the story of a fictional foundation as they **move along the journey towards decolonization**.

While this is not a real foundation, many of the practices are based on well-documented practices common in philanthropy today. As a reminder, while this story shows the difference between each model along the framework, in reality organizations will often exist across different levels and the journey is not linear in the same way that is described by the study.

Bright Horizons Foundation governance, organizational structures, grantmaking processes and requirements, and reporting processes and requirements continue to operate as before. However, with continued learning and engagement with the larger philanthropic community and peer donors, there have been some changes.

Leadership values local and sectoral knowledge more. The Board has invited one additional member that has international child and youth expertise. The grantmaking decisions include the involvement of an Advisory Board of experts from the international children and youth rights sector.

Bright Horizons also now has an internal initiative of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - with the goal to hire a more diverse team who are more representative of the foundation’s values and mission.

With recognition that more must be done to empower local organizations, the foundation has changed its requirements of applicants to include registered organizations with budgets less than \$1Million. The foundation also does more to proactively share RFP information to local organizations and push their current grantees to consider partnering with local organizations for future proposals. Bright Horizons is also providing some flexible and more long-term grants.

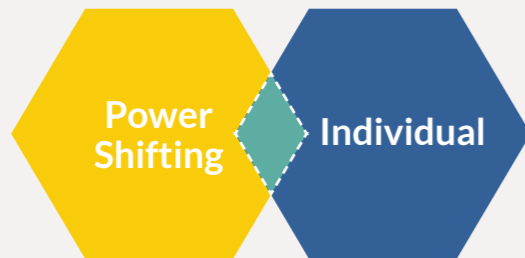
During country visits, the grantmaking team now meets with more local organizations and community members to discuss and learn about the issues, needs, and challenges within their local contexts and forges a more collaborative, partnership relationship. The efforts to have more input and involvement of local communities have prompted Bright Horizons to hire a consultant in the region to either be a Program Officer or do grants management. While some aspects of their work are now shifted out of headquarters, the same power dynamic exists. While the feedback is sought, it rarely influences decision-making processes in headquarters. Priorities for the organization continue to be set by the Board.



The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

Power Shifting Philanthropy

In power shifting philanthropy, power is shared more equally between Global North and Global South actors, and there is a willingness to prioritize local leadership and agency. **Power structures are actively interrogated and challenged, with a focus on addressing the root causes** of systemic oppression and working toward greater equity and justice.



“We recognize gaps in our knowledge and expertise and continuously learn from the voices and experiences of marginalized communities in the Global South.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Individuals are actively engaged in learning and behavior change to decolonize driven by humility and openness. For example:

- The president of the organization has hired a coach to guide their learning about anti-racism and decolonization and support their application of these ideas into their daily work and decision-making.
- A team supervisor assigns weekly assignments to their team members to read/listen/watch a resource about decolonization and decolonizing philanthropy and dedicates the first 45 minutes of their weekly team

meetings to discussion and questions. During individual check-ins, the supervisor asks their team members to describe how the weekly discussion is making them adjust their work.

Individuals regularly seek feedback on their behavior and seek to change it. For example:

- A program officer sets up quarterly check-ins with local partners to ask for their feedback on the program team’s support and what can improve. They set quarterly goals for program team behavior change with the local partner and re-assesses in the next check-in.
- A Board member will be traveling for vacation to a country where the organization operates and asks to visit with a local partner to get their feedback on how the philanthropy can do more for them.

Individuals prioritize the expressed needs and goals of marginalized communities over their own assumptions. For example:

- During a senior leadership meeting, the director of communications and fundraising expresses their concern that they need to choose a specific social issue to focus on this year for brand and messaging purposes. The director of programs pushes back, explaining that this is contrary to the organization’s priority of responding to local community needs and goals.

Individuals center the expertise and voices of local actors and marginalized communities. For example:

- A technical specialist reviewing a proposal highlights an area where they are hesitant to move forward because of technical best-practices but understands that the proposal addresses the issue by explaining that the context is different than most, and approves the technical review with a note about the minimum do-no-harm standards that must be met.



- During an interview with a popular news network, the foundation's president is asked about the organization's most impactful program being funded at the moment. The president explains the organization's approach to funding locally led and locally defined programs and highlights the impactful work being done by a local partner. The president also gives the website and social media information for the local partner if people want to learn more.



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

Sounds like

While interviewing new candidates for a position, the hiring manager asks if the candidate can describe decolonization and share any thoughts about why it is important for local actors to lead decision-making.

In preparation for the annual Board meeting, a member asks the leadership team to identify a local partner that "challenges our assumptions about development" to join the meeting in person and present their work to ensure that "we are not just talking to each other" but rather "centering the voices of our partners."

During a site visit with a local partner, a technical specialist asks them to "demonstrate their expertise" in raising awareness of child protection in the community and asks questions throughout the visit to "better understand their approach."



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel ownership over their achievements and feel equal to their counterparts globally.

Local partner staff feel respected for their contributions to improving the community.

Local communities feel supported and heard.

"We only support locally rooted organizations and people. That's our start. **We are not the ones providing ideas and solutions relevant to individuals in that particular situation, they are.** We are there as a supporter and enabler for them to do what they prioritize."

- Interviewee

"Being a listening organization is the key to who we are. To listen well, we have to be humble. If we don't have humility, we don't learn successfully. **Most importantly, we have to embed trust in everything we do.** This means building deeply trusting relationships to staff and to each grantee."

- Interviewee

"It would be a **huge mistake if we take a Western definition for childhood or child labor and impose it** on others across the world. That's why working with our locally based staff and grantees is key."

- Interviewee



Firelight Foundation

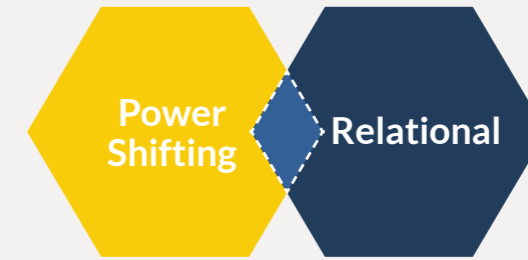
While Firelight Foundation had been making grants directly to community-based organizations since 1999, it has been on a journey to decolonize its practice for the last decade. The success of this journey is due to several factors, starting with the question of what children and youth and their communities actually want and need from Global North philanthropy.



As one of the first steps, the foundation created an open space for Board members and staff to learn together about the basic concepts of decolonization, shifting power, and systematic justice. To guide them on this journey, they began with a major research initiative asking community-based organizations and communities across nine countries what they actually wanted from Global North philanthropy and other development actors. They then used this direct evidence, as well as the ongoing perspective of those who informed it, as the framework for all of their subsequent changes. Firelight used this evidence to de-construct all of their grantmaking practices and re-construct them using the framework of Community-Driven Systems Change, which emphasizes the insight, leadership, and ownership of the people who are living and experiencing issues at the community level, and their work to create lasting change in the systems and root causes that underlie the critical issues they seek to address.

Through this process they reframed their operation and program model, centering it on the actual needs, knowledge, wisdom, experience and realities of children, families, and communities, as opposed to the perspectives of outsiders, including donors, Global North or “elite” experts and even Firelight staff themselves. As a foundation, they see all of this as a work in progress and an “aspirational process” but a critical one for shifting power and supporting Africans to effect change in their own systems for children and youth. This is all the more important because they also receive and make grants for other donors - supporting others to shift power in their philanthropy by granting through Firelight.

For the journey’s success, it was crucial for everyone on this journey from the Board, foundation leadership, program staff and Firelight’s wide range of donors to understand the power dynamics in global development and philanthropy, especially as it concerns children and youth and to be humble, open to critique, and open to learning - no one individual or even a foundation has all the answers.



“We work to build authentic and reciprocal relationships with grantee partners and marginalized communities by prioritizing their needs and perspectives, building long-term partnerships based on shared values and goals, and listening and responding to the needs and desires of local communities.”



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Philanthropic organizations prioritize the relationship with local partners based on mutual respect and trust, as equally as the exchange of money.

For example:

- A philanthropic organization has chosen to give core funding (rather than program-specific) to their long-time partner organizations and prioritize the investment in lasting relationships and the partner organization’s development. During the grant agreement process, the program team meets with the local partner organization to discuss shared values and goals, the partner’s vision for their future and requests for support.
- The long-time program officer is leaving the philanthropic organization and is handing over their responsibilities and relationships to a new hire. The program officer prioritizes introductory calls between the new hire and existing local partners - to enable the relationship to continue with open communications and trust.

Philanthropic organizations consider local partners as the expert in their community and actively find ways to amplify this knowledge. For example:

- A technical specialist is invited to speak at a panel event about child rights in Lebanon. They suggest that the event organizer talk to the philanthropy’s local partner in the country and invite their young leader to share their first-hand experience in promoting child rights.
- The Board invites a diverse cross-section of local partners to present their organization’s work and provide recommendations for future foundation strategies and funding priorities.



Philanthropic organizations prioritize the needs and perspectives of children, youth, families and communities in decision-making and program design. For example:

- Feedback is gathered from program participants of all ages using a child-friendly methodology and youth leaders are trained and supported to facilitate focus group discussions and reflections with peers as part of a participatory evaluative learning process.

Philanthropic organizations use language and imagery that emphasizes community agency and leadership. For example:

- A philanthropic organization announces internally that they will no longer use the term “beneficiary” to refer to community members, or “grantee” to refer to local partner organizations. Instead they will use language that indicates an equal relationship built on respect. The new language is validated by a representative group of staff from local partner organizations.
- A philanthropic organization announces that they will no longer use photos with the faces of children and families on their website and promotional materials; instead they will use illustrative drawings or non-face framing photos.

Philanthropic organizations invest in making their resources and funding more accessible. For example:

- A philanthropic organization invests in translation of their calls for proposals, grant agreements, and other relevant documents into all languages present in the regions where they work. They also accept proposals in any language and will invest in the translation of concept notes for review by program teams. If the program team partners with an organization that does not operate in the same language, they ensure all communications are translated and hire simultaneous interpreters for any meeting with the partner.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

During a call with a local partner, the program officer asks the partner, “what are your organizational priorities right now, and how can we support you?” The program officer takes away clear action points for implementation.

A technical specialist has been asked to support a local partner in their program design. They start the design workshop by stating that they can support the partner to “consider practices that have worked elsewhere” and to “meet sectoral minimum standards”, but that the partner is “the expert and decision-maker” about “what makes sense for their program.”



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel respected and a sense of collaboration with the philanthropic organization.

Local partner organizations feel more knowledgeable about the philanthropic organization’s strategy and goals.

Local partner organizations feel confident that they will be supported, not villainized, if there is a problem in the project.

Local partner staff feel connected to the philanthropic organization because they have long-term relationships with the program teams.

Local communities feel that their voices are heard because they are seeing improvements in the solutions implemented.



“Critical decision-making is where young people should be. They decided the critical point was during the decision-making of money and the power – how and where we spent money. That’s when we brought young people at the heart of those decisions. Where power is. That’s the start.”

- Interviewee

Children’s Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF)

In 2015, three ECFG members (Wellspring Philanthropic Advisors, Bernard van Leer Foundation, and Oak Foundation) came together to find a way to get their resources directly to local communities in East Africa and address the sector challenges (additional donors have joined since) and created Children’s Rights and Violence Prevention Fund (CRVPF), a regional intermediary fund. Based in Uganda, CRVPF provides grants and capacity development support to CBOs and local NGOs in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia with a focus on advancing the safety and rights of children, adolescents, and families. The community surrounding the child and family is the center of CRVPF as well as humility, respect, and flexibility.

In order to build trust-based, meaningful, and sustainable relationships with communities and community-based organizations, CRVPF engages with partners via a six-month learning grant and a cluster model and place-based approach, which ultimately allows:

- Community organizations to form a deeper understanding of actual realities and needs of communities;
- Community organizations to connect, collaborate, and form long-term partnerships and joint programs;
- The donor to invest more deeply and sustainably in a specific location or community.

CASE STUDY

Resources: citations and opportunities for further learning

- CRVPF [Case Studies](#): Youth and Capacity Development Program, Adolescents Girl’s Power Program, Bold Girls, Bringing Hope During the Pandemic
- CRVPF [Manuals](#): The Little Life of Mine and Parenting

Child and Youth Participatory Grantmaking

Meaningful child and youth participatory grantmaking can help to shift the power and decision-making to children and young people to transform philanthropy from the individual to the systematic level. The participatory model allows for the grantees to provide constant feedback and recommendations for ways that the foundation can both shift their practices as well as who to fund. For case studies, research, promising practices, and tools refer to: [ECFG Funders Toolkit for Child and Youth Participation](#); [We Trust \(You\)th](#); and [IDS Rejuvenate Project](#).

CASE STUDY

Global Fund for Children Partner-Led Learning Review

During the pandemic, Global Fund for Children had to adapt its existing plans for a comprehensive learning review of the first 3 years of the Empowering Adolescent Girls initiative. This program involved 17 community based organizations (CBOs) in 3 countries in Central America. Instead of hiring external evaluation consultants to visit the countries, GFC shifted to a virtual process in which local partners were supported to lead the data collection and learning facilitation and frequent exchanges were organized online for partners in different contexts to support each other and to share findings with the GFC team. The process was re-designed to be highly collaborative, creative, and aimed at strengthening the GFC-partner relationship. Because of this adaptation, partners co-created and led the design, all stages of implementation, data analysis; and reflection on the findings from the review. The process was by design flexible and thoughtful given the constraints of data collection during a pandemic. Because partners were involved in all facets of the learning process they reported improved capacity to carry out monitoring, evaluation and learning exercises on their own. At the GFC, the experience was seen as a positive and compelling opportunity to reverse any remnants of prescriptive and extractive monitoring and evaluation approaches. GFC has made a decision that future reviews will be inclusive & participatory.

CASE STUDY



A word of caution:

If participatory grantmaking is rooted in the continued paternalistic point of view of children and youth philanthropy and within existing structures and framings, then it will just continue to perpetuate colonial practices and will defeat the whole point of participatory grantmaking. We need to be careful not to romanticize participatory mechanisms and to automatically link participatory grantmaking to a decolonized approach and use it as one of the key benchmarks or guidelines. Some potential pitfalls and dangers with participatory grantmaking models are listed below:

- Philanthropic organizations continue to create unnecessary bureaucracy for the young people, within the participatory grantmaking processes, by not reforming the foundation's systems to allow deep, honest participatory work;
- Philanthropic organization continuing the colonial practices of not taking an intersectoral, non-siloed approach;
- Philanthropic organization failing to create participatory grantmaking processes and structures that are accessible to all children and young people;
- Philanthropic organization holding the ultimate power over the definitions and decisions, not the children and young people;
- Philanthropic organizations delegating risks and responsibilities onto young people and not on themselves;
- Young people perceiving the participatory grantmaking processes as extractive, harmful, and potentially disruptive of their grassroots community work and activism; and
- Ultimately, philanthropic organizations fail to reflect the participatory grantmaking models learning and new way of grantmaking across all the organization's operations and day-to-day grantmaking practices.

Resources: Reflecting on Strengths and Potential Pitfalls of Participatory Grantmaking

- [FRIDA, Resourcing Connections: Reflections on feminist Participatory Grantmaking practice](#): Report reflects on FRIDA's participatory grantmaking from 2015-2021, successes, misalignments, failures, and how FRIDA will move forward with this collective knowledge to transform its grantmaking practices.
- [What's Possible!](#) an Experimental Learning Institute and \$1million pooled fund, led by CRIF and [WeTrust Youth](#). What's Possible will enable a cohort of donors to learn directly from participatory youth-driven grantmaking processes and plan while funding participatory youth-driven grantmaking.

“Participatory philanthropy is needed. **Participatory not only in grantmaking** but across the foundation.”

- Interviewee

“Participatory grantmaking is not a grantmaking decolonized approach – **in reality it's the opposite**. But the donors don't like to hear these reflections. They only like to hear this is a good way, we like to decolonize, and this is the only way. **The donors have to understand that this is not the only way**. It resolves the guilt of donors but it's not necessarily for the movements.”

- Interviewee



“We prioritize transparency, accountability, and community participation in all aspects of our work, and actively seek to challenge and transform systems of oppression, social exclusion, and discrimination through our processes.”



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Philanthropic organizations are diverse at all levels and center trust and respect in all relationships. For example:

- A philanthropic organization has restructured its teams and all program officers live in and are from the countries where the organization gives funding. These are full time staff positions, rather than consultancies, and the program officers are considered the organization's experts in their context.



Governance and strategic decisions are rooted in the values of local leadership and decolonization. For example:

- Through regular interaction and communication with organization staff and local partners, the Board is much more aware of the issues identified as priorities for those closest to communities the philanthropic organization funds and considers those priorities as more “valuable” than business strategy.

Philanthropic organizations use participatory grantmaking models that center decision-making power in communities and do not shy away from political issues.

- (See case studies above and participatory grantmaking resources)

Philanthropic organizations prioritize transparency and trust in their finances, decision-making processes, and investments. For example:

- Annual financial reporting includes not only amounts allocated as part of grantmaking but also information about how the foundation invests and grows its endowment and any active support of divestment campaigns linked to global or domestic social justice issues. See Justice Funders Just Transition Framework for more practice examples.

Supervisors and leaders of philanthropic organizations explore equitable structures and alternative leadership styles. For example:

- A philanthropic organization re-imagines supervision/management of teams by adopting a co-leadership approach at every level of the organization. The organization chooses to pair co-leaders with different skill sets, backgrounds, and perspectives - requiring more debate, conversation, team work, and creative problem solving to lead their teams, as well as the sensitivities to have difficult and respectful disagreements.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

During their onboarding process, a new country-based program officer is told that they will be “involved in all decision-making” for grantmaking in their country because they are “the most knowledgeable” about the context and community needs.

When interviewed about their philanthropic work, a Board member explains that they were interested in serving on governance for that particular philanthropy because the organization is “committed to challenging and transforming long-term systemic oppression.”

In the midst of a recruitment process for a new finance officer, a team member suggests that they ask local partner organizations for referrals to people they know who would be a good fit for the position. When asked what experience is necessary, the hiring manager said their “number one priority” is to find someone who “will understand the necessary flexibility” in supporting local communities.



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel that they are seen as equal colleagues, rather than a needy grantee.

Communities feel well-represented because they know the people they talk to regularly are making decisions for the future of the programming.

Resource: Opportunity for further learning

- See Purposeful’s new resource describing their journey of making the organization a truly feminist organization and rooted in principles of shifting power. “[Building Our Feminist Hub](#)”



Firelight Foundation

Over the last decade, [Firelight Foundation](#) has incrementally shifted its organizational structures to reflect a more decolonized approach. Since 2018, the Board has shifted from being mostly Global North expertise to primarily African expertise and created the conditions to allow for that, such as only virtual meetings and removal of set Board financial contributions. The Board commissioned a study to examine how an organization can maintain its 501(c)3 status; since the assumption was that all or most staff have to be US-based to maintain that status. The study findings showed that you can continue to maintain 501c3 status with your staff based outside of the US; thus, in turn, over the ensuing years, the foundation staff has shifted from being mostly Americans, based in the United States, to the vast majority of staff being mostly Africans based in Africa. Over the last decade, the foundation has diversified its Board, staff, and soon senior leadership.

The foundation has taken on the challenging process of reforming its internal human resource processes and practices to ensure that these changes are not just cosmetic but real power shifts to allow for participatory trust-based philanthropy. Firelight used their nine-country research evidence (mentioned above) to de-construct their majority white, Global-North led and Global-North Governed organization and re-construct it deriving all definitions, decisions, evidence, knowledge, experience and leadership from Africa (where they do their grantmaking) and from the communities that they seek to serve. And, lastly, Firelight will hire an African leader to take the helm of the organization in the coming year - "which is the most critical but also the most challenging" component of the journey. As of 2023, Firelight will have completed its transition to an African designed, structured, staffed, informed, and led organization.

Firelight's experience highlights the importance of Board engagement, buy-in and leadership in shepherding the process but ensuring that changes are happening at all levels of the organization from governance down to administration. And the importance of tackling embedded assumptions and perceived customs as well as patience and long-term vision to implement incremental changes that can ultimately lead to more seismic organizational changes.

CASE
STUDY

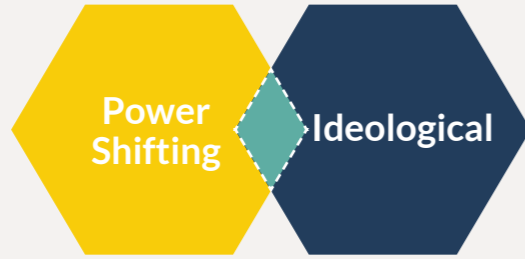
EMpower- The Emerging Markets Foundation

EMPower prefers the terminology of local leadership and power shifts but sees decolonial approaches embedded in many current ways of working at the foundation. A cornerstone grantmaking practice that sets EMpower aside from peers is the decision to provide 10-year grants with built-in flexibility for grantees to apply the funds towards most relevant priorities which are identified locally. There have been several concrete shifts in support of local leadership and shared decision-making. Overall, "power-aware" decision-making and grantmaking processes were described by the Board and staff as being part of the overall organizational "compass" even if not always explicit in written documents. EMpower has invited Board members who are practitioners with experience in different sectors, with movement-building, and activism to diversify the Board but also to create openings for transformative discussions within the Board. There is also a concerted effort to change power dynamics in governance and decision-making structures and processes by moving grantmaking decisions out of the Boardroom and into the hands of the EMpower program team, many of whom are hired locally and are based in countries where EMpower funds. In addition, EMpower is investing in adolescent and youth-led grantmaking. Other practices that are seen as part of decolonial approaches at EMpower include linking up grantees and other groups in Brazil, Ghana, and India to share their best practices, problems, and solutions. These South-to-South exchanges form part of the foundation's decolonized approach. As a senior leader in the organization said, "We don't hold all the solutions. One way to support a decolonized approach is to connect organizations that work in different contexts but on similar issues and help them share ideas and come up with better solutions. There is unique strength in connecting with peers across countries that just isn't there in vertical relationships that are solely with the foundation."

CASE
STUDY

Key Takeaways:

- Multi-year funding signals an intent to support meaningful partnership, accompaniment, and mutual trust and learning. It also supports the partner organizations in their planning, long-term strategy and organizational development.
- It is important to demonstrate the values and principles in routine practices and norms and in setting expectations about the roles of Boards and staff. Decolonization and power sharing doesn't have to be written into each document if it is firmly established as part of the institutional culture and norms.
- Financing South to South exchanges between peers signals recognition that expertise should be actively sought in the Global South and that Northern partners do not always have to be involved as convenors, facilitators or agenda setters for these events.



“We prioritize principles of equity, justice, and empowerment and work to actively dismantle systems of oppression.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations fund local partners focused on addressing systems of inequality in their context. For example:

- A local girls-led organization posts on social media that they are seeking financial support in mobilizing to represent girl’s voices in their country’s parliament debates about education reform. Any contributions will be used for recruitment efforts, transportation costs, and lodging for the girls. The philanthropy’s country-level program officer contacts them about giving a small unrestricted grant to the organization.

Philanthropic organizations work to understand the values and cultural norms in the communities they serve. For example:

- A program team collaborates with or hires a cultural anthropologist with deep knowledge of local culture and practices as a form of accompaniment for learning and documenting lessons using a cultural rights lens.



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

Sounds like

The president of a philanthropic organization holds open office hours on zoom every first Monday of the month and invites all staff and local partner organizations to join. When a new person joins the call, they start the conversation by asking “what is important to you right now?”

On a conference panel where both philanthropic representatives and local partners present an innovative model for power shifting community-led evaluation process, the partner staff and community representatives open the session by asking all participants to read out loud direct quotes and perspectives expressed by the community members during the evaluation.

On the philanthropic organization’s website, their mission and values include the “principles of equity, justice, solidarity and empowerment.”

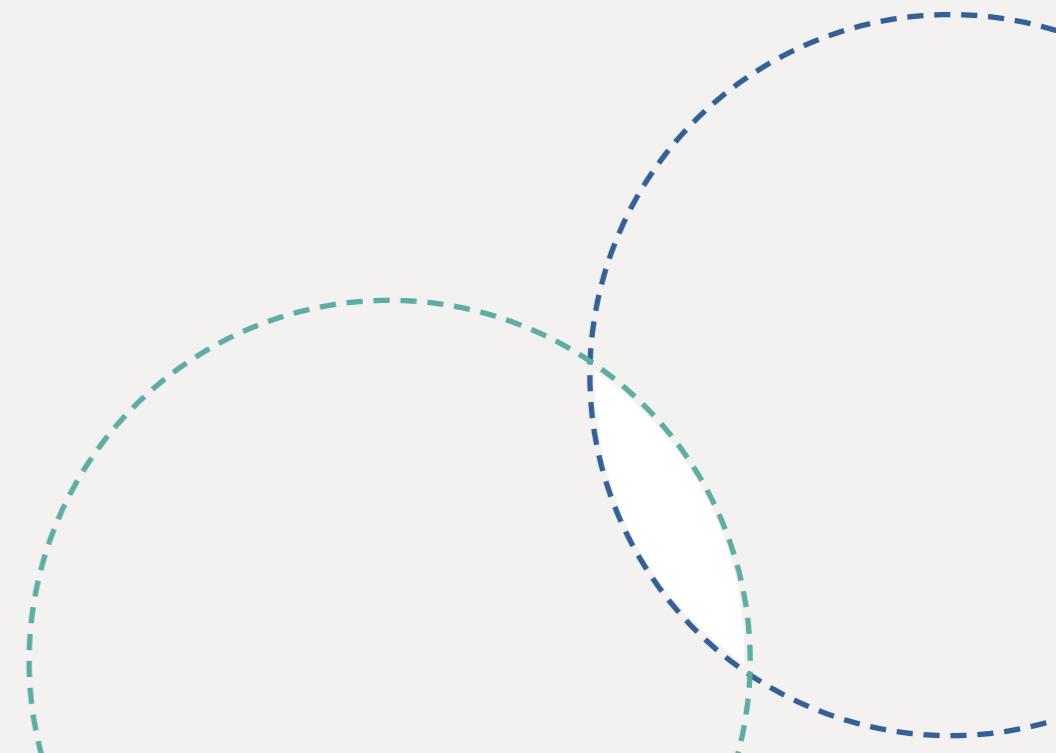


Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Local partner organizations feel that their work matters - not only to their local community, but also to the global community.

Local partners feel connected to the philanthropy and believe it is authentic in its solidarity.





Illustrative Case Study

Bright Horizons: Power Shifting

The Bright Horizons case study is the story of a fictional foundation as they **move along the journey towards decolonization.**

While this is not a real foundation, many of the practices are based on well-documented practices common in philanthropy today. As a reminder, while this story shows the difference between each model along the framework, in reality organizations will often exist across different levels and the journey is not linear in the same way that is described by the study.

Over the last few years, the Board and foundation team have begun to question and challenge the power inequalities within their foundation and the wider international development and aid system. Leadership has been intentional about creating opportunities for learning and growth, making room for honest conversations regarding the shortfalls of children and youth philanthropy, and encouraging teams to take risks and make mistakes.

Bright Horizons has reformed its governing and organizational structure. The long-time Board members from the Global North were asked to step down and were replaced by activists and leaders from countries that Bright Horizons funds in and experts (“allies”) who are known as disruptors in the sector. The Board meets virtually to allow for this diverse representation and no longer requires financial contributions. In each quarterly Board meeting, the Board Chair carves out time and space for the members to discuss and unpack issues related to trust-based philanthropy, shifting power, social justice, and humility.

The foundation gives great attention to building and maintaining a team of staff (not consultants) that are from and based in countries that Bright Horizons invests in - and centering decision-making with these teams in the Global South. Part of what has made this a success is the effort the foundation put into re-defining what “expertise” means to include lived experience, as well as expertise or training in relevant fields. Staff are supported by human resource policies and practices that reflect local needs - including shorter work weeks, longer family leave, and equitable pay scales. The entire team, including the finance and administrative team, are trained to re-evaluate traditional philanthropic grantmaking protocols and mechanisms.

The foundation’s strategic priorities are developed in partnership with local communities, children and youth, and local organizations and are based on local definitions of childhood, family, womanhood, and safety. The strategy is more holistic, rather than rooted in specific silos and sectors, and supports the Bright Horizons Board and team to make value-based decisions.

Bright Horizons has rethought their approach to identifying and choosing organizations to grant based on transparency and partnership. Priority is given to funding organizations that are led by and serve marginalized communities and

participatory grantmaking models are used to give decision-making power to those communities. The proposals are open to unregistered organizations and youth activists. The structured RFP process has been overhauled to allow local organizations to submit proposals on a rolling basis (rather than a single annual RFP). All grants are now unrestricted, flexible, and long-term (minimum 7 years) and/or renewable.

The review process has been reformed to allow for inclusion of participatory decision-making processes with the local community (including children and young people) as well as local organizations and staff. This is possible to do in a meaningful way with the foundation team members living in the countries being funded and often speaking the same language as communities included. The Board members are now more inclined to follow the recommendations of the staff in deciding who to fund and allocate resources to.

The grant agreement and compliance requirements are based on equitable structures. Thus, this allows for organizations to develop their own indicators and requires Bright Horizon to be more transparent about their indicators; funding is built in for M&E, particularly for data that the funder needs but is not relevant to the grantee.

In all its grantmaking decisions, grant agreements and compliance requirements, the Board and staff are reevaluating and questioning assumptions and customs in philanthropy that have come to be considered as law over the years, even though they are not legally binding. These customs often involve policies and rules that restrict the flow of resources to certain communities, particularly racially marginalized communities, due to a lack of trust in their ability to handle money. ¹Accordingly, the Board has conducted an internal study with the auditors to determine what is required in US and Belgium jurisdiction as far as compliance and making changes according to that report.

The reporting requirements are flexible and allow for multiple ways to share their progress, such as through visual storytelling, videos, or verbally by phone or video link rather than written format. Because grants are unrestricted and flexible, there are less financial reporting requirements (including submission of receipts). Now financial reporting is not used for compliance, but rather for Bright Horizons to learn where resources are most needed and being utilized. All reporting can be done in the grantee’s local language.

The relationship between grantees is much more than transactional and instead is a mutual partnership that is rooted in trust, humility, and respect. Team and Board visits are designed together and rooted in gaining a deeper understanding of what the grantee partner needs from Bright Horizons and the local community’s needs. Bright Horizons does all logistical planning and provides additional funds as needed to cover unexpected trip costs as well as staff time.

If there is a change to the grant (including termination due to internal strategic shifts within the foundation), the team member discusses with the organization and puts in place contingency planning to ensure minimal disruption to the organization structure and programming, including offering transition funding or closing grant.

1 Bright Horizons is turning to intermediary funds for learning and knowledge - e.g., Urgent Action Fund, Purposeful, CRIF, and With and For Girls Fund.

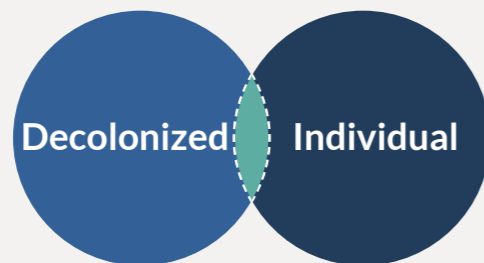


The Framework to Decolonize Child & Youth Philanthropy

Decolonized Philanthropy

In the decolonized model of philanthropy, **power is truly shared and distributed equitably** among all stakeholders through explicit and observable practices and systems and with a focus on **collaboration, partnership, and learning** from local communities and partners.

Philanthropic work is guided by principles of anti-oppression, anti-racism, and social justice. Through observable systems and practices the grantmaker seeks to interrupt persistent cycles of oppression, adultism, racism, and inequity in the grantmaking and partnership practices as well as in institutional structures and practices from governance, staff recruitment, and internal reflection, learning, and change.



“We continually reflect on our own positionality and power as a philanthropy in the Global North and work to constantly learn from and lend solidarity to our partner communities in the Global South.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic leaders and staff believe in and are committed to actioning the values of decolonization. For example:

- A long-time Board member based in the Global North calls on their other Global North based members to follow them in stepping away from the Board and nominating an activist/leader from the Global South to replace them.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

- A finance officer invests time and energy to learn and digest information about the origins of and power dynamics in philanthropic wealth. They choose to start an Instagram account targeted to others in financial fields to raise awareness of this issue and share how they are changing their daily practices in their role as a member of leadership team and in their personal capacity.
- Program staff continue to meet on a regular basis in solidarity learning groups to self-reflect and share with peers about their own personal and organizational positions of power, past practices and how they can intentionally work differently.

Annual Board meetings are open to all staff and partner organizations via Zoom. People are encouraged to submit questions or comments ahead of the meeting, and the chat option is open for additional comments. The Board Chair expresses that this is “the way things should be done” to enable the organization to “be the best it can be.”

The representative from a family foundation shares on Twitter that they have “closely examined the sources of my wealth” and now understand that it has been “built on the extraction from marginalized communities over generations.” They then commit to “breaking this cycle.”



Feels like

Impact on partners and their communities

Local partner organizations feel optimistic that this is more than rhetoric since the actual organization structures and mechanisms have changed.

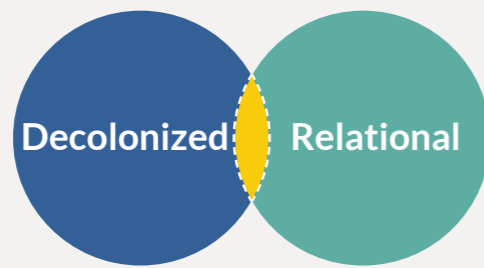
Community members feel validated for their frustration and exhaustion, and relieved that it is finally being recognized.



“The way to begin to really dismantle some of this is to **just really sit with how unbelievably bad we as a collective have been** at thinking about these questions, at addressing these problems and challenges, and most fundamentally at **not taking responsibility for our part...** and perhaps the solutions lie elsewhere and not with us. And I think that’s really difficult to wrap your head around because that means some of us are going to be out of work right, it means some of us aren’t going to raise money... have books to write about, whatever it may. But I think **until we have that reckoning that the dismantling doesn’t really begin.**”

- Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay

Associate Professor, Hubert H. Humphrey, School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Reconstructing Children’s Rights Institute, Conversation #1



“We build relationships with local communities and organizations based on solidarity, respect, and shared decision-making, and actively support local self-determination and sovereignty.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations use their platform to amplify local partner and community voices. For example:

- The communications team starts a new campaign to draw attention to the work of youth leaders globally. During the first week of every month, they give access to the philanthropy’s social media accounts to a different youth-led partner organization to showcase their work and the issues that matter to them.
- Philanthropic organization’s leadership put their own equity on the line and give up their power for someone else by inviting local partner’s leadership to present at global SDG or UNCRC meetings, rather than themselves.

Partnerships are mutual and based on deep trust. For example:

- Program officers based in each country visit the local partner organizations once a month in an effort to become familiar with the partner’s operations, staff, and community. The program officer also uses it as an opportunity to receive honest feedback and requests that go beyond funding.
- Philanthropic organizations form equitable and mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with local organizations. For example, philanthropic organizations should first ask if the partner organization has established organizational protocols (e.g., safeguarding, DEI). An equitable partnership means that both partners should agree to and sign onto the organizations’ respective protocols instead of asking only the organization receiving funding to sign onto the funder’s policies and protocols.

Philanthropic organizations acknowledge and seek the expertise of local partners. For example:

- Each technical specialist working for a philanthropic organization is required to spend one week each year shadowing a local partner leader or program manager to learn about their ways of working and contextual solutions.
- A program officer recognizes that one of their local partners is struggling with an issue similar to an issue that was resolved by another partner in the same country only a few months prior. The program officer holds a meeting with the leaders of both partner organizations to offer peer guidance.
- Children and young people are appropriately included in the foundation strategy design process; authoring and owning their narratives, accomplishments and movement-wide stories of change.

Local partner organizations are supported to create their own networks. For example:

- A philanthropic organization hosts an annual retreat for the leaders of all partner organizations during which they can learn from one another, create connections, and build their own professional networks.



Philanthropic organizations choose to give direct and unrestricted money with no time boundaries or reporting requirements. For example:

- Unrestricted funds are given in large amounts to proximate intermediary organizations for their re-allocation to local partners. There are no requirements for reporting, only a request to stay in touch and hear more about the intermediary’s work in the future.



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

Sounds like

“I trust you” or “I trust your vision.”

“We do not live in your community, you do. We trust you know what is best for your children and families.”

A program officer introduces a local partner to their former colleague and friend who now works for a major corporate donor interested in funding local leadership. In the introduction the program officer describes the local partner leader as the “heartbeat of the community” that has created change through “their creative and contextual solutions.”



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Local partners feel respected and recognized.

Local partners feel part of a global community with shared goals, vision, global solidarity and collaboration and, ultimately, increased impact.

“**Changing the model completely.** Instead of providing funding its being in relationship with folks and supporting resources that they need to collectivize and fight for change.”

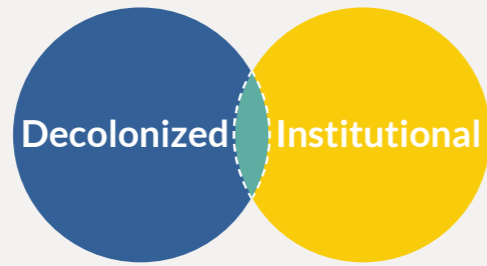
- Interviewee

“Foundations must **devolve decision making power to partners** as they are the one who directly work with children, youth, and families. Foundation needs to know the realities of children and youth. **Effective change will come by taking time to understand** the realities of children, youth, families, and communities.”

- Interviewee

“In our grantmaking we understand that the privilege that we have is access to resources. **But the resources don’t belong to us, [they belong] to the activists.** The resources are rooted with the activists, and we honor that in our relationships... We don’t place the burden on them to access resources and on [showing] how they use the resources. We make sure that it’s based on a relationship of trust. As a principal, we don’t do spot checks or site visits. We have eliminated in many cases the application process, in the traditional sense.... There is no requirement for registration, since we know that it can be a tool for oppression... We are in a relationship. **Accountability is not to us but to the movements to each other**, to people in their groups, and to the activists that we are working with.”

- Interviewee



“Our structure and processes are guided by organizations and marginalized communities in the Global South to address the root causes of systemic inequality and create lasting change.”



Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Looks like

Philanthropic organizations are driven by the goal to redistribute wealth.

For example:

- The Board of a philanthropic organization chooses to spend down and sunset their organization over the next ten to fifteen years. They prioritize impact investment models for Global South youth-owned businesses focused on social and environmental solutions.
- See “Bright Horizons” case study for other examples of redistribution of wealth.

Philanthropic organizations transparently share their mistakes and learnings. For example:

- Philanthropic organizations convene listening and feedback sessions with all their local grantees to discuss partner survey responses, evaluation findings and identified mistakes, and respond to feedback that they have received. The staff report on concrete course corrections and changes being made and jointly agree on mechanisms for partners to continually provide feedback.

Philanthropic organizations invest in a new generation of philanthropic actors and local leaders. For example:

- A philanthropic organization creates a community of practice of young leaders and activists challenging international norms of philanthropy, development, and aid and funds their joint efforts to mobilize change.



Sounds like

Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated

- A foundation sets a financial target for annual contribution to local community foundations (i.e. community led philanthropy), prioritizing community foundations with youth and youth-focused local organizations on their governing board.

Philanthropic organizations act as a connector of local communities to the global community. For example:

- A philanthropic organization invests in the publication and distribution of visual arts, storybooks, videos, and other mediums produced by children and young people from Global South communities to amplify their knowledge, truth, and experiences of justice, safety, and community.

A family foundation posts a press release that explains that they will “spend down” their wealth over the next ten years by investing in “youth-led efforts to disrupt systems of power.”

A network of philanthropic institutions regularly shares its emerging lessons and reflections from the network members’ decolonizing journey at philanthropic conferences, leadership events, and through industry publications and advocates for changes across the wider sector.

See “Bright Horizons” case study for example of reparation and justice oriented philanthropy.



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Local leaders feel empowered to be creative, courageous and supported when testing new strategies for movement building and systemic change.

Young community members feel a sense of ownership over their future.

Local organizations hear back from community and youth leaders regarding the impact of the foundation's investments and are eager to continue to partner and engage with them.

“The good way to understand decolonization is to **practice anti-colonial activities!** When we discuss we only discuss, but **we have to practice... Try to have baby steps for decolonial practice.** What is the minimum that you have to do? Maybe minimal if you work with young people is to hire youth in your spaces, don't prioritize the thinking or analysis but hire more youth consultants to give money in other ways.”

- Interviewee

“[Within grantmaking] we have a lot of assumptions about what's required legally that is not required, it is a custom. These are lots of customs in philanthropy and in the INGO sector that we have taken on as law that are not law. So, **I think there has to be a reckoning and questioning of all of these rules and policies that we put in place...** and embedded in the idea is that we don't trust the people that are getting the resources. So, many of the 'customs' are colonial and racist because it is the assumption that certain people, Black and Brown people, are not to be trusted with money, and so we have to create rules and barriers... to keep resources away from Black and Brown folks... **Customs that we have put in place because of distrust.**”

- Dr. Ramatu Bangura

Executive Director, CRIF, Reconstructing Children's Rights Institute, Conversation #3

“**No project-based funding** – the reason we say it's problematic; it's because you believe movements have to exist, we fund them period. **My commitment is to fund the movement.** When they are losing, winning we fund them? When we don't fund movements in sustainable ways, we lose ground. It's what happens in voting rights, climate justice, reproductive ways.”

- Interviewee

“For me what is important for anti-colonial practice, is to **provide more political training to administrative areas of donors.** For me the most traditional limitations of international donors are the administrative ways (administrative staff who hold the traditional rules of donors– accountants, administrators, etc). You need to involve them to be more critical and political.”

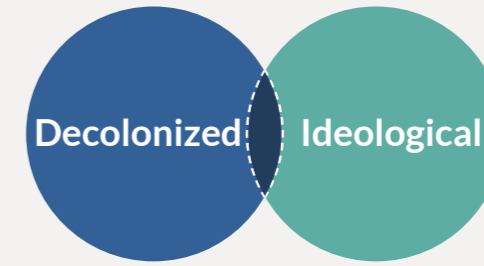
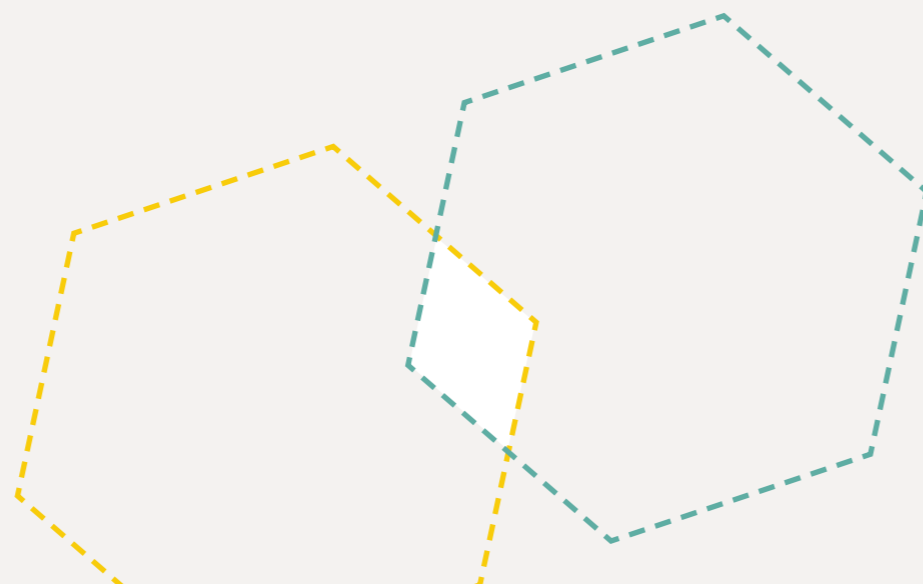
- Interviewee



Stars Foundation (former ECFG member) to With and For Girls Fund Learning Journey

Shifting power and resources is a long-term journey that does not happen overnight and takes many, many steps. The journey of Stars Foundation (former ECFG member, which closed down in 2019), which incubated With and For Girls Fund - the world's first Africa-rooted global fund for girl activists and their allies, resourcing girls' resistance across the world - exemplifies this journey process.

While the program staff were not talking about a "decolonized approach" they were shifting power from the board over time. In the beginning, the Stars Foundation Board, which did not include international development experts or activists, made all the funding decisions. The program staff began speaking to the Board to shift the decision-making from them to expert advisors (e.g., UNICEF, INGOs, academia), in order to make their work more efficient. Eventually, they brought their grantees into the discussions. And so, bit by bit, the program staff were able to take power away from the board and the board's only role became to ratify the decisions. They disrupted the board's expertise. As a result of all these steps, the program team was empowered to incubate With and for Girls and begin the development of a funding model that pushed all the power to the girls. It was not about decolonizing; it was about shifting power to people who knew the issue and should have been leading the decision-making process. The program team was able to get to the point of meaningful participatory grantmaking because they were already working on devolving power in different ways.



"We are rooted in principles of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and decolonization and work to create new models of philanthropy that advance community self-determination, solidarity, and collective liberation."



Looks like

Observable behaviors of philanthropic actors

Philanthropic organizations do not shy away from political issues. For instance:

- The leadership of a philanthropic organization talks honestly and publicly about the organization's political engagement, commitments, and support.

Philanthropic organizations actively support efforts for justice, equity, and solidarity. For instance:

- A philanthropic organization funds youth-led social movements and political action that contribute to justice and equality in a community or country.

Philanthropic organizations take risks and embrace small acts of rebellion. For instance:

- A Board member is invited to attend and speak at Davos. They RSVP "yes" and attend accompanied by a local youth activist focused on global inequality and modern colonialism. The Board member gives their speaking opportunity to the young activist and anytime the member is called upon to speak in session, they cede to the young activist for their input and opinion.



“A full child rights-based approach would have **authentic relationships and people with lived experiences**. Looking at a rights-based approach for children rights, we also need to look at it in the overall social justice field- **addressing patriarchy, exploitation, capitalism**. It’s a politicized agenda. Sometimes the child rights field side steps that politicization.”

- Interviewee



Common sentiments of philanthropic actors heard - *openly said or implicitly/subtly communicated*

Sounds like

On their website, a philanthropic organization states clearly that they “apologize to marginalized communities” for the “harm done in the past” and outlines its mission to “contribute to dismantling systems of oppression.”

A program officer describes their work to a friend as “supporting communities in their fight for liberation.”



Impact on partners and their communities

Feels like

Communities feel that their harm is being recognized.

Communities feel hopeful that global allies will push for restitution.

Communities feel that external organizations are in solidarity and true partnership with them and are collectively working towards ensuring that children feel safe and free from violence.

Children’s Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF) - Decolonize!

CASE STUDY

Since Children’s Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF) is a collective challenge to reinvigorate and transform the global children’s rights field by building power with youth activists and their allies. In community with partners, CRIF seeks to move resources to young people, and to advance collective funder learning and exploration that can shift power and practice in the children’s rights sector. A core set of deeply held values guide and ground all aspects of CRIF’s work - intersectional feminism, centering those with lived experience, leading with curiosity, moving at the speed of trust, honoring intergenerational wisdom, working with radical transparency, shifting power to youth activists, and honoring child and youth resistance. As a donor learning community and grantmaking fund, CRIF cultivates innovation and collaboration to dismantle the root causes of children’s vulnerability - racism, colonialism, and other systematic oppression - and strengthens the root drivers of their wellbeing and power.

Through their organizational structures, visual and narrative storytelling methods, and grantmaking practices, CRIF is attempting to de-silo the sector’s understanding of children’s lives, challenging adultist funding norms and strategies that limit children and youth’s access to funding opportunities, decolonizing approaches to address harm, and expanding the sector’s imagination and understanding of what childhood and safety means and looks like. To this end, CRIF is shifting decision-making and resources to children and youth by establishing participatory grantmaking collaboratives that define a strategy for future grantmaking and ultimately providing opportunities for children and youth activists to build a community. Via the collaborative grantmaking model, the youth activists were supported financially, linguistically, and nurtured and cared for as individuals and a collective of activists with social power and agency. One of the key lessons has been the importance of investing in and creating space to translate all materials in the local languages and including simultaneous translation in all languages to allow all stakeholders and grantees to be active and equal partners in the room (language justice). Equitable translation - or language justice - across all aspects of CRIF’s grantmaking and learning operations and structures is a starting point for decolonizing children’s rights.

Resources: Learn more about CRIF’s decolonized approach

- CRIF Learning Brief, [Decolonize!](#) vol. 1, no. 1
- CRIF Learning Brief, [Seeking Safety](#), vol. 2., no. 1



“We need to have the discussion about where money is coming from - the origin of the funds. And when do we not accept money? And how are decisions made - who is involved, transparency, participation, who is it meant to impact. Who owns information, data, and learning? Who benefits from it? Need to really challenge why we are collecting certain information and how it’s being used.”

- Interviewee

Illustrative Case Study

Bright Horizons: Decolonized

The Bright Horizons case study is the story of a fictional foundation as they **move along the journey towards decolonization.**

While this is not a real foundation, many of the practices are based on well-documented practices common in philanthropy today. As a reminder, while this story shows the difference between each model along the framework, in reality organizations will often exist across different levels and the journey is not linear in the same way that is described by the study.

Bright Horizons has evolved even further over several years to be rooted and operationalized in principles of social justice, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and decolonization. Their public mission is “to advance children and young people’s self-determination, solidarity, and collective liberation.”

The foundation now fully acknowledges that international children and youth’s rights work is inherently political, and, in turn, the foundation’s work is deeply political. Accordingly, Bright Horizons prioritizes funding social and political movements as well as programs that seek to dismantle oppressive systems (e.g., child welfare). The team also invests in work that advances new systems and practices forwards that do not create additional harm. As one of the key donors in the children and youth philanthropic sector, Bright Horizons is using its platform to encourage others to do the same.

As an organization, Bright Horizons has taken on an influencing agenda to support the redistribution of its wealth as well as a recognition of the system that has helped create it. The foundation and Board did a 6-month research and reflection exercise to unpack where the foundation’s money comes from and where the extraction happened

historically. By asking questions regarding the foundation’s current investments, the team questioned whether investments continue to be extractive and exploitative, and how it can shift their practices to find ways to make reparations¹. The foundations has also shifted away from harmful investments to impact investment models in social and environmental businesses² as well as creating land and wealth trusts to institutions created by communities most impacted by colonialism. The Board is also considering a spend down and sunset plan over the next ten to fifteen years.

The evolution in Bright Horizons’ priorities is reflected in its governance and leadership. The Board is drawn almost entirely from the countries that the foundation funds and includes those with lived experience. Leadership is from the Global South and the foundation team is more and more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age, language, and experiences. This evolution was not done in a tokenistic way but rooted in justice and true decision-making power.

The foundation staff, specifically program officers, are not separate from the work they fund, but rather understand that they have a responsibility to move money in deep solidarity with the community, children, and young people in the movements being funded. They truly get to know the movement and support space for grantee-partner driven convening and they fund learning. The staff understand and believe in the work they are funding.

While the foundation maintains a team of program officers for grantmaking, there is special attention to participatory grantmaking structures. The identification of potential grantees is done via consultation with local partners, including children and young people. As an organization, Bright Horizons does not shy away from power dynamics, but instead transparently shares how and what they are to use their power for - to move money to make change, to limit bureaucracy, and to bear the brunt of compliance and risk.

The team is no longer treating compliance like a trap, rather setting up their grantee partners to be successful by being clear about what the team really wants to know and absorbing as much of the labor that compliance as possible. The team is no longer asking questions they will not read.

The donor-grantee relationship has now evolved to mutual respect and true collaborative partnership in which the grantee is seen as teacher, guide, and fellow advocate in the larger ecosystem. The grantee feels supported and knows that the team will show up for them when needed, such as showing up to events (where invited) and provision of space and portfolio for them to be seen. While the power is always there, grantee partners can speak with the team and even some of the Board members candidly. The grantee even feels empowered enough to comment on the foundation’s strategies and are invested in Bright Horizon.

¹ Resource: Resource Generations, “Journey of Wealth” - curriculum developed by [Resource Generation](#)
² Bright Horizons learned from fellow philanthropists, such as Dreilinden Foundation. See [Transformative Philanthropy: Giving With Trust](#).



Moving the Framework Forward: ECFG as Leaders of Change

Opportunities and Practical Resources

ECFG, as a network of influential donors, can play an important role in the children and youth field and philanthropy at large in helping to **shift colonial practices and devolving power to proximate actors** such as local organizations and communities.

External stakeholders and funders recommend that ECFG lean into **their power as a collective and be “moral conscious.”** ECFG can affect philanthropy reforms, if the group chooses to lean into their power as a collective. **Recommended next steps:**

- **Establish a (peer) funder learning community** grounded in safe learning, trust, mutual respect, and shared risk to expand the donors’ collective and individual imagination, experiment with new directions in shifting practices and devolving power, and share learning and lessons learned.
- **ECFG can provide the space and time to explore questions without expecting immediate results.** The ECFG community can be in partnership with peers in the community that are undergoing similar learning journeys, such as [CRIF](#), [CRVPE](#), [Purposeful](#), EMpower, Firelight, non-member foundations, and peer funder groups.
- **Create smaller peer-to-peer learning groups**, for example:
 - Peer-to-peer learning community for Board members to speak to other ECFG member Board members. Board members can discuss their respective change processes, learn from one another, and influence others in the philanthropic community.
 - Form “Healing Communities” or “Race Identity” cohorts as a safe space for wellbeing and care and interrupting cycles of racism within philanthropy. See examples of such initiatives under Resources below.
 - Create a space to allow for more political discussions and political framings and, accordingly, support non-traditional actors and actions pushing for dynamic shifts/changes.

- **Actively seek out or commission alternative viewpoints or locally-led research** that helps to better understand the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of different grantmaking approaches .
- **Partner with ongoing initiatives** that are already organizing and leading collective learning efforts related to decolonial approaches and shifting power such as What’s Possible (see description above)
- **Leverage collective power and influence** of the membership to advocate and influence bilateral donors to shift and reform practices and to directly shift resources to local organizations and communities (Examples of other funders groups advocacy work includes: [Global Philanthropy Project](#) and [Gender Funders CoLab](#)).
- **Explore ways to align or pool funds** among ECFG members to experiment, take risks, and implement decolonial grantmaking practices that donors are unable to do as individual donors (e.g., co-funding intermediary children’s rights funds such as [CRIF](#) and/or [CRVPE](#) that have already begun to shift colonial practices).

“It’s not just a role. They have a duty to **embody the kind of systematic changes that need to happen.** Now there is no more excuse because conversation has shifted and the growing consensus of history and harm of these institutions in the ways of our practices... **They need to be bold and need to embody that boldness and steer the port and change in a radical way** – practices of giving money, what are the parameters, who is having resources? Who is deciding on these resources, How are these resources decided on? Intentionality of funding anti-racist work and naming that is part of responsibility for children’s work.”


- Interviewee

“Try to move the traditional donors to be critical to be and to **do something outside of the boxes and be more bold.** I imagine this Elevate group to give more security to the donors because they sit together and just say we do wonderful things but **need to push to move on to allow for these conversations.** We need to do a lot of things.”

- Interviewee

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June 2023

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A publication of Elevate Children Funders Group

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