



Rethinking CSR and Local Giving

Validation and Collaboration Convening on Local
Business Philanthropy in Northern Uganda



“When the Shadows Lengthen, It Is Time to Light Our Own Lamps”; African Philanthropy Takes Centre Stage in Gulu

In February 2025, [CivLegacy Foundation](#) convened a pivotal gathering at Acholi Inn in Gulu, bringing together stakeholders from Arua and Gulu to validate a groundbreaking study on local business philanthropy. The study, which mapped business-led giving across Gulu, Arua, Jinja, and Mbale, provided a sharp look at how enterprises contribute to education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and environmental conservation through corporate social responsibility (CSR), financial support, and in-kind contributions.

Against the backdrop of shrinking donor funding for civil society, the study reinforced what many in the sector have long understood: *“The best way to eat honey is to share it with others.”* African philanthropy, rooted in solidarity, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, has never been more critical. The gathering aimed not just to validate these findings but to spark a larger conversation on how civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector can move from transactional giving to transformational partnerships that drive social impact and business sustainability alike.

From Talk to Action: A Gathering of Minds and Means

The convening opened with welcoming remarks from CivLegacy Foundation, setting the stage for an engaging and, at times, provocative dialogue on the future of African philanthropy. Participants reflected on the role of local businesses in building community resilience, with stories illustrating how enterprises are stepping up to bridge funding gaps left by retreating international donors.

One particularly striking contribution came from Innovation Village, a small business development center committed to empowering entrepreneurs. Their representative detailed how they provide skills training, marketing opportunities, and startup support, including “starter packs” to help fledgling businesses take flight. Notably, [Innovation Village](#) has a dedicated philanthropy budget, which it channels through CSOs to fund initiatives that strengthen community resilience and sustainability.

Their approach is a testament to a larger truth: *“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”* The most effective philanthropy is not charity but co-investment in solutions that create shared prosperity.

The gathering also celebrated the continued success of organizations supported by CivFund, the grant-making arm of CivSource. Organizations like [GWED-G](#) and [GLOFORD](#), which have benefitted from CivFund’s model of trust-based, flexible funding, are thriving and attracting new investment from a range of donors. Their success stories reinforce a growing reality—African philanthropy is no longer a stopgap for donor fatigue; it is an engine for sustainable, locally-driven development.

One of the most thought-provoking moments of the convening came during a panel discussion on strengthening collaboration between CSOs and the private sector. The conversation explored how businesses and civil society can move beyond short-term, feel-good CSR projects to forge long-term partnerships that create systemic change.





A key theme emerged: philanthropy in Africa must evolve from sporadic acts of generosity to a culture of structured, intentional giving. The mindset shift is crucial, not “How do I benefit?” but “How do we build?” As one participant put it, “Even the best cooking pot cannot prepare food by itself.” True development is co-created, not bestowed.

The discussion also underscored the role of policymakers in shaping an enabling environment for philanthropy. Without supportive legal and policy frameworks, local giving will remain informal and under-leveraged, limiting its potential to drive systemic change.

The convening led to several key recommendations for expanding and institutionalizing local philanthropy:

- 1. Regular Engagements Between CSOs and the Private Sector:** Establishing consistent dialogues to explore new opportunities for co-creation, not just funding transfers. This will shift philanthropy from a reactive model to a proactive, strategic approach.
- 2. Celebrating and Amplifying African Philanthropy:** Challenging the dominant narrative that philanthropy is the domain of international donors. Africa has a long history of giving, and it’s time to shine a light on homegrown generosity. Consider this: A 2021 study by the African Philanthropy Forum found that over 70% of giving on the continent is informal, happening through family networks, community contributions, and religious giving. That’s an untapped force with immense potential.
- 3. Self-Mobilization and Structured Collaboration:** Encouraging CSOs and businesses to form regional philanthropic networks, ensuring that homegrown giving remains resilient to global funding shifts. The private sector must recognize that *“When the rhythm of the drum changes, the dance must also change.”* The old model of business-first, social responsibility later, is no longer tenable.

As the convening came to a close, CivLegacy Foundation reaffirmed its commitment to fostering continued dialogue and collaboration. The momentum generated in Gulu is just the beginning. The real challenge now is to transform African philanthropy from a reactive safety net into a proactive force for systemic change.

CivLegacy Foundation and its partners believe in the power of African-led solutions, and this convening was a reminder that *“A single bracelet does not jingle.”* It will take collaboration, vision, and commitment to build a future where local philanthropy is not just an alternative to external aid but the primary driver of sustainable development across Uganda and beyond.

The work continues. The question is, who is ready to build?

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