

***Promoting the Value of
Community Led Philanthropy:
Kenya Community Development
Foundation (KCDF)***

The Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), established in 1997, is a philanthropic foundation supporting sustainable community-driven development. As an independent entity, KCDF represents a departure from the traditional philanthropic model in Kenya. It introduces an innovative approach to grant-making by focusing on local fundraising and participatory grant-making to ensure the communities' voices are integrated into the grant.

KCDF was established in opposition to the prevailing aid ecosystem, which perpetuated colonial practices by bringing outsiders from urban areas or other countries to address community issues. This approach undermined communities' dignity, denying them the opportunity to solve their own problems and experience a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, the aid landscape was dominated by prominent ICSOs, with smaller community-based organisations relegated to the role of service providers without direct access to funding.

In 2011, KCDF introduced its community-based grant-matching model. This model has been instrumental in creating an ecosystem that empowers community-based organisations and individuals in Kenya to raise resources for their projects, with KCDF stepping in to source the

other needed portion. Central to this model is the belief that communities, regardless of their economic status, possess resources, from funds to people and infrastructure, that can contribute to their development. KCDF acts as a catalyst, encouraging communities to recognise and leverage their resources while providing opportunities to engage them in their own development processes and embracing community-owned solutions.

Capacity-building is a crucial part of this funding model, as it enhances organisations' ability to independently gather funds or access their resources and conduct actions directly related to their communities' needs and wants. KCDF's approach to capacity building deviates from traditional top-down methods, instead prioritising experiential learning based on a participatory organisational capacity assessment.

This approach is reinforced by the KCDF's focus on long-term partnerships. Since 2011, the KCDF's funding model has moved away from competitive grants, limiting calls for proposals and prioritising long-term partnerships. They recognise that organisational growth is dynamic, and therefore, the support provided to partners needs to evolve with time. In contrast to the common practice of funders developing "exit plans",

KCDF adjusts its partnerships based on the organisation's changing needs. They consciously and intentionally seek to retain them, creating long-lasting relations and gradually allowing grantees to scale up their work. Through long-term partnerships, KCDF has discovered that they can:

“do a lot of layering. You're able to build on gains of the first cycle instead of saying, “I have transitioned you out”. You are able to relate differently because needs and challenges are dynamic, and this leads to even greater survival, more impact and stronger organisations.”

Caesar Ngule, KCDF's Programmes Director

Alongside this approach, KCDF offers a range of capacity-building initiatives focusing on local resource mobilisation, lobbying and advocacy, and financial resilience.

KCDF's participatory funding model prioritises meaningful engagement with partners from the outset, especially during the proposal development stage. KCDF grant-making process is characterised by its openness and inclusivity. There is no one-size-fits-all approach; instead, the process is flexible and considers each organisation's context. Community organisations act as mediators,

representing their communities' interests. Therefore, the Foundation is mindful of the community's perspective while recognising the valuable contribution of these organisations. Their review process

“ looks into their specific capacity, needs, and the level where they are in terms of their growth and sustainability; we don't have a standard for reviewing.”

Hellen Kuria, KCDF's Coordinator of the Community Voice and Philanthropy Programme

Likewise, the grant cycle aims to demystify themes, emphasising their linkages and interconnectedness, while striving for funds that are as unrestricted as possible, which will depend on the type of funding available. KCDF negotiates with donors, advocating for leniency given the unique context of the communities they serve.

This way, even in cases where funding is topic-specific and lacks a grant-matching component, KCDF ensures community participation to strengthen ownership. This approach cultivates accountability and trust within communities. For instance,

“if KCDF gave money to a water project and I contribute 500 shillings, which might seem very little, but then based on that, I became a stakeholder; I am an owner, and I want to know what is happening.”

Caesar Ngule, KCDF’s Programmes Director

However, in addition to restricted funding, large and overwhelming funds can also present a challenge for KCDF’s model since they dilute community and local philanthropy efforts. They aim to mitigate this scenario by balancing external investments with communities’ self-mobilisation and self-resourcing nature.

Balancing external investments with the need to sustain local self-mobilisation is crucial. The complexities of the existing aid structure and the lack of sufficient resources further contribute to KCDF’s challenges. The shift towards a participatory model at KCDF is a new concept, and changing mindsets and practices takes time. There is resistance from individuals fearing job insecurity as power dynamics evolve.

The innovative and participatory funding model implemented by KCDF has yielded positive outcomes, enhancing the Foundation’s credibility in Kenya. KCDF has cultivated a critical

mass that trusts its grant-making approach.

It has fostered partnerships characterised by active community involvement, empowering communities to contribute their ideas, resources, and expertise as equal partners. This approach leads to greater ownership and sustainability as communities retain new capacities, a contrast to traditional grants where the departure of key stakeholders upon funding conclusion often leaves communities struggling to sustain projects. Many local organisations have benefited from the resources received, leading to their growth, enhanced organisational capacity, and the addition of more funds.

The participatory model has minimised resource waste by promoting accountability and trust, empowering communities to mobilise resources. This increased agency and problem-solving autonomy have reduced reliance on KCDF over time, thus lowering costs.

Learnings:

- Organisations providing funds to community-based organisations should consider their absorptive capacity carefully, as large funding injections can potentially disrupt the community-based approach. Determining the fund’s “right size” is relative to the community’s needs and interests and, therefore,

requires actively engaging them.

- ▶ ICSOs can foster enduring partnerships with small community-based organisations to provide sustained support in addressing challenges that may emerge over time, applying adaptive learning. Trust plays a crucial role in acknowledging and effectively resolving these challenges. ICSOs can assist these organisations in proposal writing while still ensuring compliance with donor requirements.
- ▶ Explore innovative ways to fund or support communities, including local fundraising and community participation. Consider not only the financial resources they can provide, but also their knowledge, ideas and willingness to contribute with their time or infrastructure. These models should empower communities to leverage their assets beyond monetary contributions, fostering a sense of ownership in development initiatives.