RESOURCING YOUTH POWER TO THRIVE

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

STATE OF YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY 2024

Our Research Team

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LEVEL UP

#FundYouthPower Principles

1. Put young people in the driving seat.
2. Compensate young people fairly for their part in the process.
3. Make the application process easy and accessible.
4. Don't just fund the usual suspects; fund traditionally marginalised and excluded groups and individuals as well.
5. Provide unrestricted, core, and long-term funding.
6. Treat each young person as an individual.
7. Invest in young people beyond finances.
8. Prioritise mental health and wellbeing support.
9. Look to the future. Develop sustainability plans with the grantees.
10. Monitor together.

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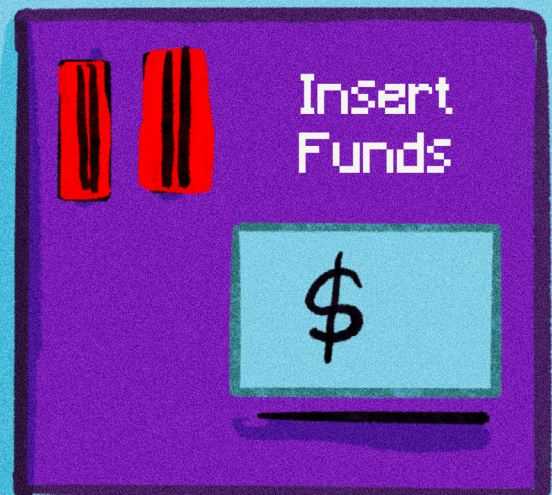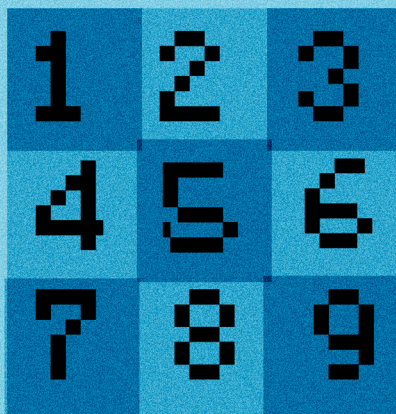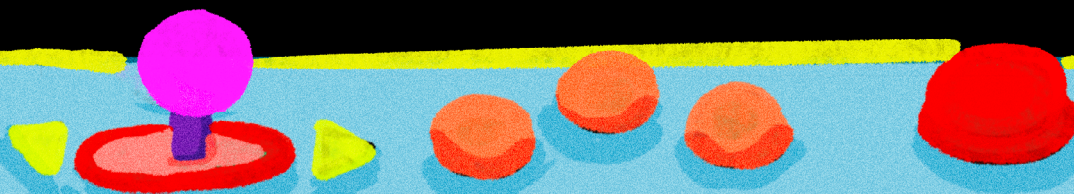
FOREWORD

Imagine a world where young people are not just beneficiaries of change but the architects of change. In this world, their passion, creativity, and resilience are harnessed to address the most pressing global challenges. This vision is within reach, but it requires a fundamental shift in how we support and resource youth-led initiatives.

The power of young people is undeniable. By engaging in actions ranging from local clean-up campaigns to providing critical support during national disasters and pandemics to influencing policy change, young people can create change. However, access to funding has been a crucial challenge for too long, particularly for youth-led organisations, unregistered groups, movements, and individual young people. Despite the variety of funding sources available - such as government grants, private sector investments, and donor funds - the complex application processes often serve as prohibitive barriers, preventing young people from fully harnessing their potential.

Motivated by these challenges and the urgent need to invest in youth power, this report delves into the best ways to resource youth-led initiatives. It identifies the types of resourcing that truly fuel young people's activism.

Conducted by ten young researchers from across the globe over three months (July-September 2024), this research explores the funding mechanisms that enable youth civil society to flourish. By deploying a youth-led research approach, we engaged directly with funders who have supported youth-led initiatives through various models and captured the experiences of young people from diverse backgrounds: young people living with disabilities, young women, trans and gender-diverse youth, and those from urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. This intersectional insight, often missed in conventional research, provides a nuanced understanding of which resourcing models are most effective for young people to thrive.

As you read, you will see this report calls on traditional donors, private sector funders, development practitioners, and government actors to align with what young people

say works for them - and they can do this by implementing the 10 #FundYouthPower principles. We urge a rethinking of funding practices, rebuilding trust, and decolonising aid by adopting less bureaucratic and more accessible requirements that make grants available to young people. These funds must be accessible so that young people can actively participate in designing societies that meet their needs through meaningful engagement with donors at both local and global levels.

Participating in this project has been enriching for us as young researchers. It has allowed us to connect with other young people, hear their stories, and amplify their voices. We hope the many voices of young people and funders compiled in this report will guide the global co-design of grants and funds, effectively transforming youth resourcing models.

We thank all the young people and funders who shared their insights with us, and we thank Restless Development and Fondation Botnar for their support in empowering the present and future generations of young leaders through the youth-led research approach. Thank you for accompanying us on this remarkable journey.

Kudzai Mutemeri and Mugalula Ashiraf on behalf of the youth researchers

INTRODUCTION

We know the crucial role that young people play in building better societies, and previous State of Youth Civil Society reports from Restless Development have charted young people's impact during times of crisis as well as times of renewal. However, despite their significant contributions, youth-led movements and young people face considerable challenges in accessing financial and non-financial support from different entities. The rollback on human rights, reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding, and the rise of authoritarianism continue to block young people from accessing necessary resources. These challenges are compounded by stringent financial requirements and application processes which emanate from a lack of trust in young people and unsustainable, short-term funding which hinder their ability to secure necessary resources.
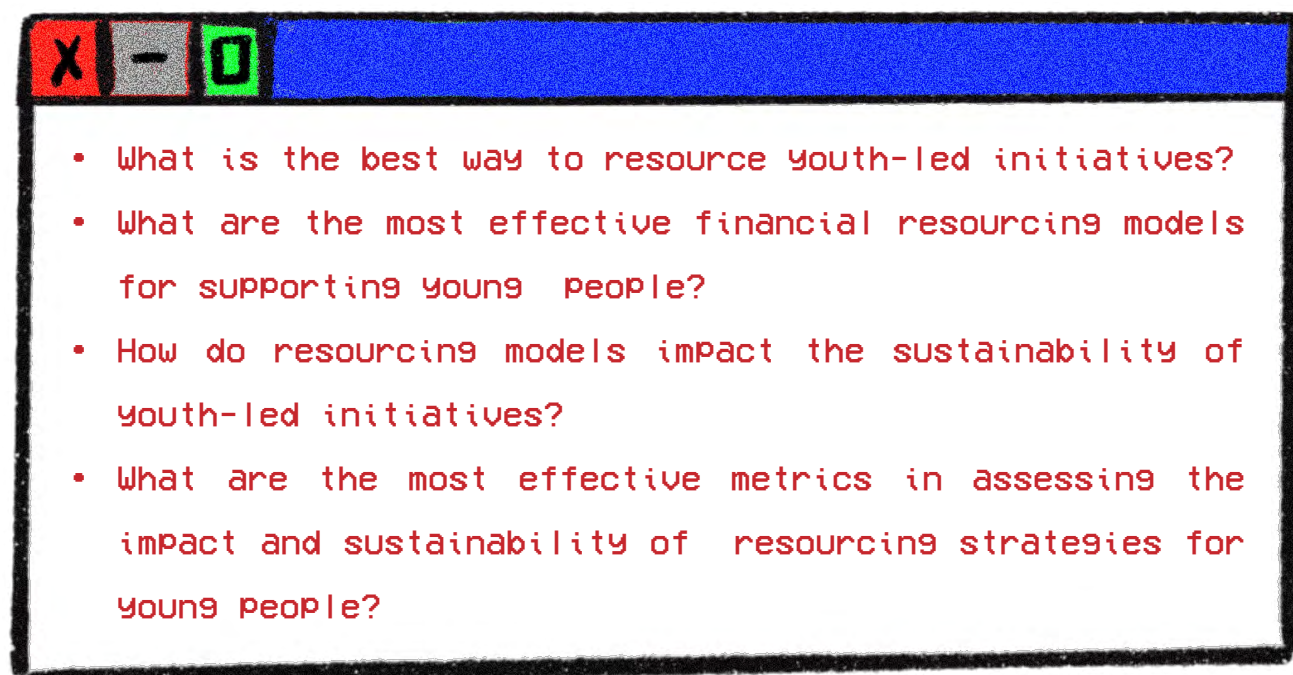
Most funding for civil society organisations and social movements comes from Official Development Assistance (ODA), often cascaded directly from the Minority World to the Majority World or through third parties. In 2020, only 5.56% of ODA funds from the top 10 gender equality donors were allocated to gender equality goals and initiatives targeting 10 to 24-year-old young people (OECD, 2024). Moreover, Young Climate Justice found that only 0.76% of climate funding goes to young people. Young people experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, including those from rural communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and Young People with Disabilities (YPWDs) receive a smaller portion of funding.

The funding snags are expected to worsen over the next few years, with some donors reducing their contributions to ODA. For example, the Netherlands' right-wing government plans to cut ODA by 300 million euros in 2025, 500 million euros in 2026, and 2.4 billion euros annually from 2027 (Chadwick, 2024). France, a significant player in overseas development, has seen a slowdown in its GDP, resulting in a 13% cut in ODA in its 2024 budget (Focus 2030, 2024). The rise of far-right governments in Europe, reductions in GDP, and unpredictability of the upcoming United States elections have created uncertainty regarding financial resourcing for young people.

Funding prospects have never looked gloomier, yet the stakes have never been higher.

Against the backdrop of dwindling financial resources, alternative forms of funding young people have emerged. These include crowdfunding (utilising platforms such as Kickstarter, GoFundMe, or Indiegogo), conducting peer-to-peer fundraising, and partnering with businesses that have Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives aligned with the organisation's mission and impact investment.
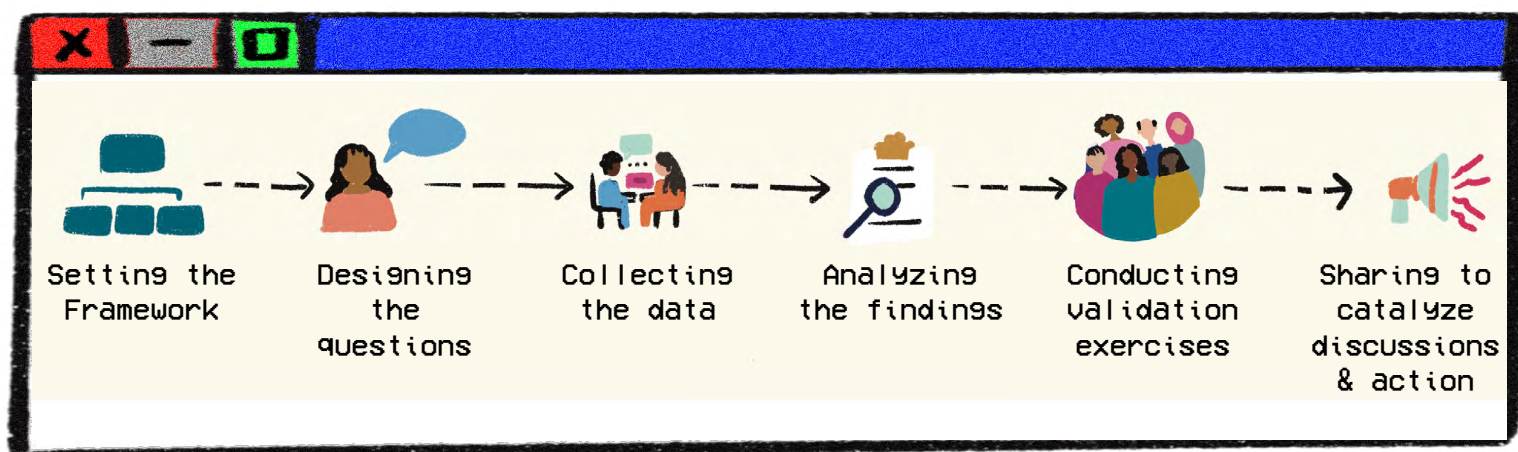
In this year's State of Youth Civil Society Report, **Resourcing Youth Power to Thrive,** ten young researchers analysed the types of funding models that enable youth civil society to thrive, identifying forms of impact measurement and exploring the implications of failing to resource youth power adequately. The researchers spoke to eight different youth funds to understand the characteristics of a youth-powered fund, and sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the best way to resource youth-led initiatives?
- What are the most effective financial resourcing models for supporting young people?
- How do resourcing models impact the sustainability of youth-led initiatives?
- What are the most effective metrics in assessing the impact and sustainability of resourcing strategies for young people?

Methodology

Restless Development's youth-led research goes beyond meaningful youth engagement; it ensures that young people's insights are captured by those best positioned to do so—the young people themselves. This methodology is about shifting power to young people, enabling them to co-produce knowledge. What sets this approach apart is the clear and defined roles for both staff and young researchers at each step, designed to maximize youth leadership and agency.

Youth leadership is central to every phase of the research process and is led by young people. The 2024 State of Youth Civil Society Research exemplified this approach, with young people acting as equal partners throughout the research design, delivery, and analysis. Ten young researchers from Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, India, Lebanon, Uganda, the UK, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe were recruited through an open call, ensuring inclusivity.

Setting the Framework → Designing the questions → Collecting the data → Analyzing the findings → Conducting validation exercises → Sharing to catalyze discussions & action

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

Restless Development initially developed the overall research framework, which young leaders reviewed to ensure it aligned with their priorities. Once finalized, the framework was further refined to incorporate any crucial elements that might have been initially overlooked, with young people providing valuable input.

DESIGNING THE QUESTIONS

The research employed three data collection methods: a literature review, interviews with funders, and journey mapping with young people. The young researchers took the lead in designing the literature review protocol and developing the data collection tools for the journey mapping and funder interviews, all grounded in the research framework. Staff provided training and guidance on creating practical data collection tools.

COLLECTING THE DATA

The young researchers were at the forefront of the literature review, conducting interviews with funders and leading the journey-mapping exercise, profiling young individuals who had benefited from the funds. Restless Development staff offered support and supervision, collaboratively troubleshooting any challenges. Through their efforts, the researchers engaged with eight funders and four young individuals during the journey-mapping exercise.

ANALYZING THE FINDINGS

Data analysis is a critical component of Restless Development's youth-led research methodology. It provides the key insights that make up our final research products. Young leaders participated in a participatory analysis workshop, conducting a preliminary deductive thematic qualitative data analysis. To ensure the success of the process, a detailed and comprehensive data analysis plan, with a robust analytical methodology and guidance, was developed. This plan allowed young researchers to reflect on the data collection and transcription process, a new experience for many of them.

Key findings and insights

Our research team identified the funding models that work best for young people, although these models still have their disadvantages which must be taken into consideration. We spoke to funders who are working hard to exemplify best practice and get money directly to young people, and took insights and inspiration from them on how to improve the funding system for young people and youth-led organisations.

THE BEST TYPES OF FUNDING MODELS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Trust-based funding model

What it is?
The trust-based funding model emphasizes the importance of flexibility, trust, and simplicity in due diligence processes. Funders provide financial resources, technical support, and strategic counsel to youth-led initiatives. The model values the experience and expertise of young people, and allows youth organisations to address issues relevant to their communities without being bound by stringent donor requirements.

'Donor Notes'
"We believe in trusting young people directly with funds, offering them financial freedom and unrestricted funding, which is often rare. This approach allows them to manage their initiatives, cover essential costs, and hire necessary expertise. Trusting young people with direct funding empowers them and acknowledges their ability to lead effectively."
(Donor representative)

Advantages and Disadvantages
One of the most significant advantages of the model is that it allows youth organisations to address issues relevant to their communities without being bound by stringent donor

requirements. The model focuses on building the capacity of youth organisations, making it easier for smaller and nascent organisations to access funding, and encourages new youth-led initiatives to enter into partnerships, fostering innovation and inclusivity.

However, while the trust-based funding model sometimes involves long-term financing, the challenge comes when donors focus on short-term funding, undermining youth-led initiatives' sustainability. Evidence shows that the sustainability of youth-led initiatives hinges on the availability of long-term financing (CIVICUS, 2019; Plan International et al., 2024; and Restless Development, 2023).

Unrestricted funding model

What it is?

The unrestricted funding model offers an effective mechanism for supporting young people because it gives recipients autonomy and decision-making power over funds. This approach contrasts with traditional funding models by offering more freedom to youth organisations, allowing them to focus on their core needs and priorities and exploring new avenues through innovation. Some young people and youth-led organisations have been turning to crowdfunding to bring in unrestricted income.

'Donor Notes'

"Applying for grants shouldn't be a tedious, complicated process. For us, it is as simple as a one-pager, where we already know what we need and the type of organization we want to fund. Simplifying the grant-making process in this way makes it more accessible, especially for young people in rural or marginalized communities."(Donor representative)

Advantages and Disadvantages

One of the biggest and most significant advantages of this model is that it offers autonomy and flexibility. This can empower youth organisations to allocate funds based on their specific needs and contexts, promoting tailored and effective interventions and helping ensure the design of programs is based on the needs of grassroots communities rather than donor-imposed priorities.

While it is the most sought-after, unrestricted funding is the least available funding source for young people's initiatives because of a lack of trust, unequal power dynamics, and negative perceptions of organizational capacity, among other issues.

Crowdfunding is a possible avenue for raising unrestricted funds. However, The recent move towards crowdfunding may also start to present challenges as rising authoritarianism and restrictions from governments could derail the opportunities crowd-funding. The Kenyan government has recently introduced a bill that, amongst other things, dictates how fundraising appeals are conducted, and mandates all entities, whether individual, corporate, or organisations, to obtain a permit for public appeals from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Development and the County Executive Committee Member in charge (Mwangi 2024). While this is specific to the Kenyan context, it could lead to other countries taking a similar approach, further restricting civil society organisations that are responding to challenges within their communities.

The re-granting model

What it is?

Some trust-based and unrestricted models offer provision for re-granting. This involves providing funds to more prominent or known organisations who then redistribute the money to young people and smaller youth organisations. The organisations who receive and distribute the money absorb the risks associated with
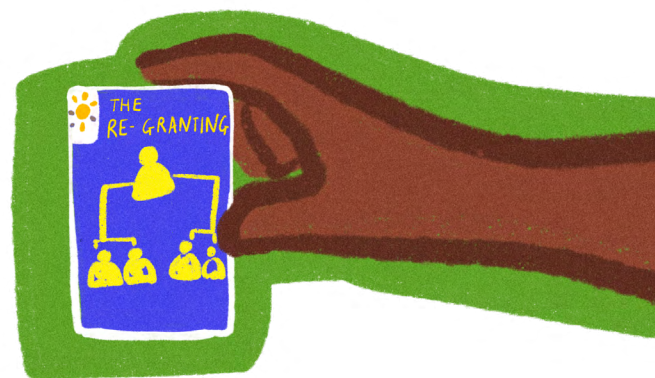
supporting nascent youth organisations, and often provide technical support to ensure quality project delivery and financial management.

'Donor Notes'

"We recruited a young steering group of 16 people from diverse backgrounds who've worked on a range of issues and from a range of geographies through an open recruitment process, and then we brought them together to help design the fund, thinking about who we would fund, the criteria, application process, and the type of support we might put alongside the funding." (Re-granting partner representative)

Advantages and Disadvantages

The benefits of the re-granting model is that this enables money to get to organisations who might not normally get funded, perhaps due to their size, capacity, registration status, or the stringent due diligence requirements set by the donor. When implemented well, the model embraces the idea that young people are changemakers who can use funds to design and implement projects and programmes to solve the challenges and issues that affect them. The model also often offers additional technical support, and doesn't just focus on financing.

One of the disadvantages of the model is that it could be open to abuse, with more prominent organisations taking too much of a cut of the fund to sustain their own organisation. That said, when done well and fairly, it is important for the sponsor organisation to be able to cover their true costs in order to ensure the model is workable.

Philanthropy model

What it is?

Philanthropic funding consists of both restricted and unrestricted funding. Individuals, organisations, foundations often provide the financial resources to support social caus-

es, charitable activities, and public benefit initiatives. This funding typically addresses societal issues, such as poverty, education, health, and the environment, by providing grants, donations, or investments to non-profits, social enterprises, or other entities that work towards these goals (Stanford Center on Philanthropy Society, 2020).

'Donor Notes'

"A sustainable and effective funding model must include capacity-building opportunities to ensure young organisations have the necessary skills, manpower, and financial literacy to utilize grants effectively. With this support, funds can be well-spent on effective programs. Donors should collaborate closely with recipients, providing guidance and training on managing resources to achieve better outcomes and enable continued support in the future." (Donor representative)

Advantages and Disadvantages

Philanthropic giving can often be very generous, and depending on the setup can have all the advantages of the trust-based and unrestricted models. However, a disadvantage of philanthropic giving is that, as with trust-based and unrestricted models, it can often be short-term and unsustainable. In addition, philanthropy, if done badly, can often feel unequal, giving a sense of charity and dependency and exacerbating power imbalances. More equitable approaches can be based on mutual aid or African philanthropy models which move away from the idea of funder and beneficiary, and instead focus on the notion of collective giving — emphasising that even the smallest community-based groups can provide unique contributions to a partnership.

The impact of resourcing models on the sustainability of youth-led initiatives
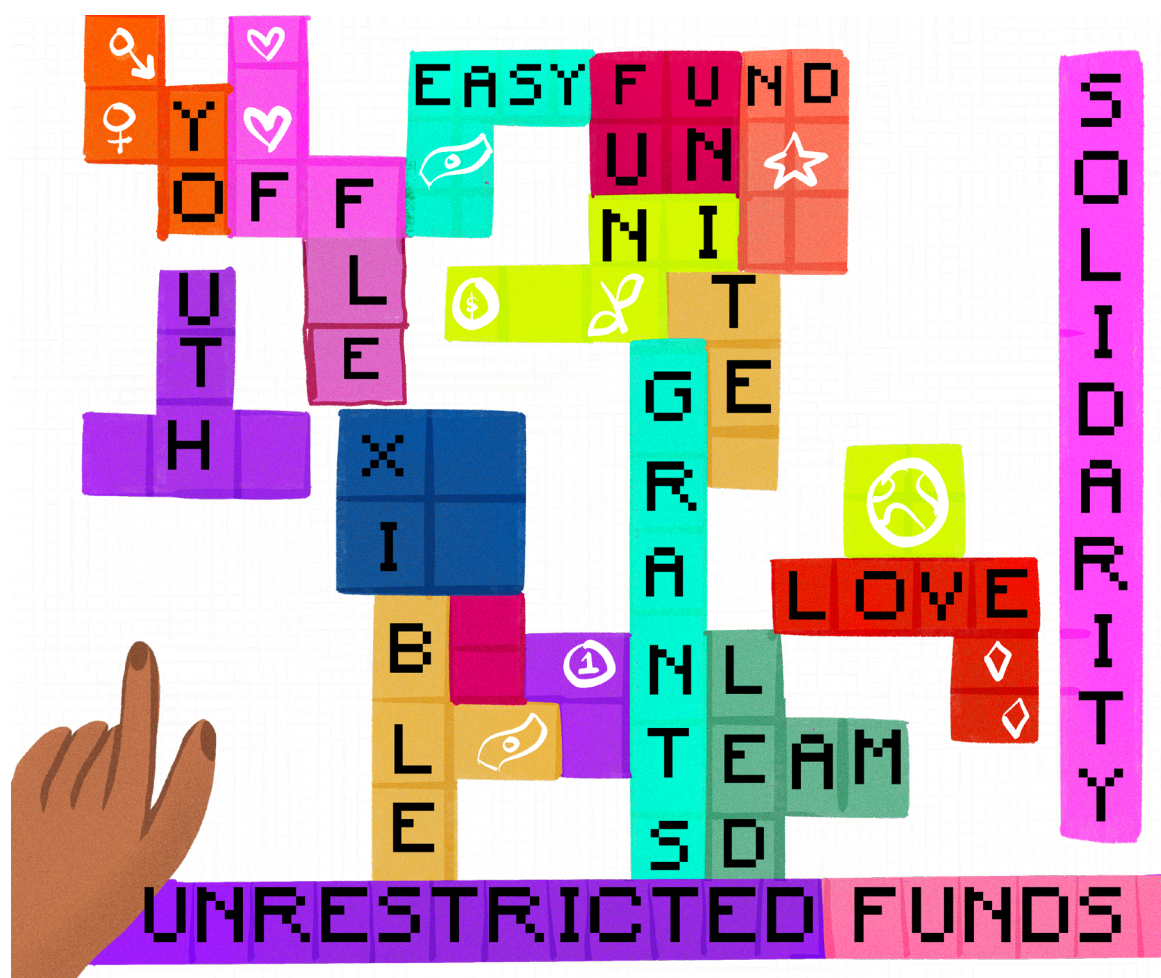
We discovered that the resourcing models' impact on youth-led initiatives' sustainability is closely tied to how the model is designed, monitored, and delivered. One of the most common ways to ensure sustainability, as mentioned by the funders, is by **consulting young people** on how a fund can be structured to effectively meet the needs of young people. This consultation should focus on gaps, where young people are consulted on their capacity-building needs and work with the funders to determine how their needs can be met. As such, this forms a meaningful and productive youth-donor partnership that promotes meaningful dialogue.

In addition to the above, having a youth advisory board or a steering committee that oversees funds disbursements to youth-led organisations and movements can ensure the sustainability of youth-led initiatives.

"We recruited a young steering group of 16 people from diverse backgrounds who've worked on a range of issues and from a range of geographies through an open recruitment process, and then we brought them together to help design the fund, thinking about who we would fund, the criteria, application process, and the type of support we might put alongside the funding." (Re-granting partner representative)

Properly packaging and communicating the impact of youth-led initiatives is crucial when exploring how resourcing models affect their sustainability. Effective communication of effects is a powerful tool in demonstrating the value of these initiatives to stakeholders, including funders, policymakers, and partners. These initiatives can make a compelling case for continued or increased investment by providing clear evidence of success, highlighting their long-term benefits, and the importance of sustained support. This approach helps secure funding and builds trust and credibility with those interested in youth-led efforts' success.

"It is crucial for youth organizations to effectively communicate their impact and tell their story to attract and maintain funding." (Donor representative)

Moreover, well-packaged impact communication is critical in informed decision-making and iterative improvement. By sharing the results of these initiatives, stakeholders can better understand which resourcing models are most effective in ensuring sustainability. This knowledge allows for a more strategic allocation of resources and fosters an environment of continuous learning and adaptation. Additionally, communicating impact encourages transparency, which can attract new partners and collaborators while strengthening existing relationships, ultimately contributing to a more diversified and resilient resourcing model.

The role of impact communication extends beyond external stakeholders to build the

agency of the youth leaders. Involving young people in documenting and communicating their initiatives' outcomes validates their efforts and builds their capacity in essential skills such as evaluation and advocacy. Building the urgency of young people is vital for the long-term sustainability of youth-led initiatives, as it fosters a sense of ownership and agency among the youth, ensuring that they remain active and engaged in driving their projects forward.

Another defining characteristic that ensures the sustainability of youth-led initiatives is the capacity building of young people. What the founders said about capacity building echoed what we found out in the literature review. Building the capacity of young people as part of the funding mechanism makes them more knowledgeable and skilled to access more strategic, long-term, and unrestricted funding. The most effective approach for capacity building for young people is to have them define the areas in which they need capacity building and how they want the process to unfold. The process should also recognize and acknowledge the contextual realities, leaning heavily on the expertise of local groups and institutions to ensure contextually relevant capacity-building packages. This approach has proven to work effectively for one of the funders who was interviewed, who mentioned that:

"Our capacity-building approach is grantee-led, allowing organizations to identify and request the specific support they need, whether it's in communications, campaigning, or financial management. While some areas like safeguarding are mandatory, the focus is on tailoring support to meet each grantee's unique needs." (Donor representative)

Another funder also mentioned that:

"A sustainable and effective funding model must include capacity-building opportunities to ensure young organizations have the necessary skills, manpower, and financial literacy to utilize grants effectively. With this support, funds can be well-spent on effective programs. Donors should collaborate closely with recipients, providing guidance and training on

Some funders go beyond building young people's capacity to recommending them for additional funds. In addition, some funders provide extra funds for mental health and well-being support, personal development, or organizational development. Investing in personal development ensures individual sustainability beyond the organization and propels young people to tremendous professional success.

The research team also found that many youth-led initiatives need support with sustainability plans, particularly in turning income-generating activities into viable long-term businesses.

"The main challenge in maintaining financial sustainability is the unsustainable nature of mainstream funding." (Donor representative)

Social enterprises and income-generating arms of charities are potential solutions but are challenging to implement in reality. This is because of the need for more financial literacy and market access to sustain the business after the initial funding period has lapsed. This scenario usually happens with mainstream funding, which could be more sustainable. Organizations often receive funds that run out, leading to a scramble for the next donation. This issue is compounded by a lack of financial literacy and the absence of a dedicated finance department, which are crucial for forecasting and managing the organization's economic lifespan. Without this expertise, directors, who are already juggling multiple roles, may not realize the organization's financial limitations until it's too late, putting the entire operation at risk.
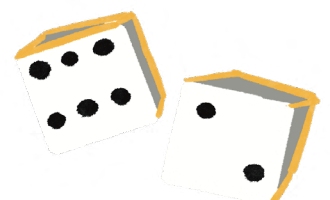
Effective metrics in assessing the impact and sustainability of resourcing strategies for young people

Impact reporting is crucial in demonstrating and assessing the impact and sustainability of resourcing strategies for young people. It enables donors to understand the progress and effectiveness of youth organizations and is an effective metric for assessing and resourcing young people. The success of youth organizations is determined mainly by their ability to clearly and effectively demonstrate their impact to funders. Impact reporting, as reported by respondents, is usually done routinely where young people who have accessed funding meet with the funders to set goals, review achievements, and establish new objectives, which is good for sustainability. This process helps ensure that initiatives are on track and that both parties are engaged in the impact reporting and demonstrating process.

"Success is measured by the ability of youth organizations to demonstrate their impact clearly and effectively to funders. Effective metrics include the number of youth engaged, the scope of community impact, and economic outcomes such as job creation." (Donor representative)

Financial indicators, such as funding utilization rates, economic stability, and return on investment, were highlighted as vital in assessing resource efficiency and the long-term sustainability of initiatives. How these indicators are defined and measured should be defined by young people to ensure contextual relevance. Non-restrictive funding models assess effectiveness and scalability through metrics like program reach, adaptability to different contexts, and long-term impact on communities. These

metrics provide a comprehensive view of an initiative's potential for growth and sustainability. On the other hand, youth engagement and empowerment are measured through metrics that track the involvement of young people in decision-making roles, their influence on project outcomes, and their feedback on the level of empowerment they experience. Ensuring inclusivity and equity in these metrics involves continuous feedback from youth participants, diverse evaluation teams, and intersectional analysis to capture various experiences and outcomes.

Quantifying and monitoring results requires a balanced approach using qualitative and quantitative metrics, focusing on the initiatives' social and economic impact. Effective communication and storytelling are essential in conveying these results to funders. However, designing metrics that accurately capture the diverse experiences of youth can be challenging. Additionally, non-restrictive funding models need specific, tailored metrics to assess scalability and effectiveness.

Power dynamics within the funding sector are unbalanced. As previously noted, "The funding sector is very middle-class, white, and privileged." Based on findings, this affects how the impact is understood, measured, and communicated.

"At the international stage… they ask for evidence. They might want a website to see what activities you have been conducting or for a Facebook or Twitter page to see what you have been doing and how much impact you have been having. If you can provide this and have the documents, you might be able to get funding."
(Funding recipient)

Using metrics defined by a few people who often have greater privilege based on race, age, geo-location, and other identities negatively affects equitable and intersectional impact measurement. Metrics defined by a singular demographic may not take into consideration unique experiences of traditionally marginalised groups.

The extent to which a fund has been inclusive is another important metric in assessing the impact and sustainability of resourcing strategies for young people, especially since traditionally marginalized youth in the majority world are often left out. If a fund prioritizes inclusivity, it ensures that it reaches diverse communities and intersectional groups and is responsive and collaborative, providing capacity-building opportunities. It shows that it has had an impact and will likely be sustainable. Sometimes, funders raise concerns over the cost of working with traditionally marginalised groups or young people facing multiple forms of discrimination, including YPWDs and LGBTQIA+ communities. Inclusivity should be intentional and targeted to ensure greater representation and impact.

Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) also emerged as an essential tool to measure the effectiveness of funding models. PMEL is a collaborative approach involving stakeholders, in this case, young people, in assessing and improving projects, programs, or initiatives. Unlike traditional methods that are often top-down and rely heavily on pre-defined matrices and external evaluators, PMEL seeks to build the agency of those directly affected by the project to contribute to its assessment and ongoing development actively. This approach is rooted in the belief that those most impacted by a project have valuable insights and perspectives that can enhance its effectiveness and sustainability.

THE SOLUTION

We believe the best funding models should dismantle existing power structures and shift power to young people, ensure trust in young people, offer mutuality, and provide a collaborative approach between young people and funders.

Responding to the key challenges faced by young people, our research team — alongside Restless Development colleagues around the world — have devised **10 #FundYouthPower Principles** to better support young people in their vital roles as community developers and activists.
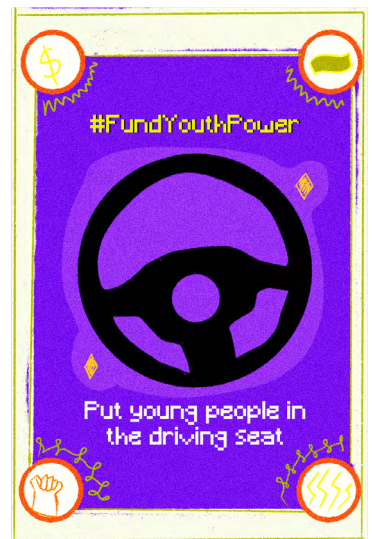
#FundYouthPower principle 1

"Some of the funds are designed by older people with no contribution or participation from young people."

Put young people in the driving seat from the start.

Enable young people to get funds to other young people. Trust young people to lead every stage of the process, engaging them to co-design and deliver the fund from beginning to end. Establish a youth steering group that represents diverse social stratifications, geographies, and identities, and co-design funds **with** young people, not for young people. The steering group should support the fund's establishment, identify selection criteria, select grantees, and oversee disbursements. In addition, the group should support the development of monitoring and evaluation metrics. Establishing the group shifts the power to young people with the knowledge and expertise on what works best for them.

#FundYouthPower principle 2

"Some institutions and funds do not provide adequate remuneration for young people in the Advisory Groups. We should practice what we preach and compensate young people for the work they do."

Compensate young people fairly for their part in the process. Funders should build and maintain equitable rather than transactional partnerships when working with young people — especially when establishing steering groups to co-design funds. Time and resources should be invested to develop solid relationships with youth-led initiatives and groups to build trust and form more meaningful collaborations. Young people should be paid fairly for their role, and consideration must be given to data / internet access, working equipment such as phones and tablets, and adaptations to ensure the inclusion of all young people in their diversity.

#FundYouthPower principle 3

"In my experience, donors with simple grant applications have very rigid financial requirements and guidelines - this is exhausting for youth. It's exclusionary, ineffective, demotivating and negatively impacts any efforts for trust-building."

Make the application process easy and accessible.

Establish simplified and intersectional application processes hinged on the principles of diversity and inclusivity. Opening the applications to include simplified questions and audio and video submissions ensures more diverse grantees. Current funding models favor young people with a higher education level and increased access to resources. Decolonization of aid should focus on adopting less bureaucratic and more manageable requirements that make grants more accessible for youth-led initiatives and groups. Such processes and requirements are often hurdles for young initiatives applying for grants. Funders should recognize language barriers and develop mechanisms to bridge the gap. The application process should have attainable eligibility criteria for young people, unlike conditions that limit them — such as being registered, previously funded, in existence for at least three years, or having audited accounts. These conditions often push away young people working in smaller organisations that require more funding.

#FundYouthPower

Make the application process easy and accessible

#FundYouthPower principle 4

"Sometimes the same people receive funding.
They ignore other groups, especially those who are
usually left behind."

*"The funding sector is very middle-class, white,*
and privileged."

Don't just fund 'the usual suspects'. Youth-led initiatives and groups are incredibly diverse. Funders must recognize this and adapt to become more inclusive, empathetic, and open to funding youth-led action, even if it feels scary. Outreach to underrepresented groups with support from the steering group and snowballing should be a priority. Young people are central in connecting funders and institutions with their networks and communities. When funders open application processes, they should be intentional about reaching out to underrepresented and traditionally marginalized groups, such as young people with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ youth, through snowballing and support from the steering group.

#FundYouthPower
Don't just fund the usual suspects

#FundYouthPower principle 5

"The funds are very little sometimes and for a short
time."

Provide unrestricted, core, and long-term funding. Shift the power by providing youth-led initiatives with flexible, core, long-term funding that lasts. Funding should be holistic, responsive, multi-year, and timely to ensure that organisations and movements have the capacities and resources to respond and rebuild new and better futures.
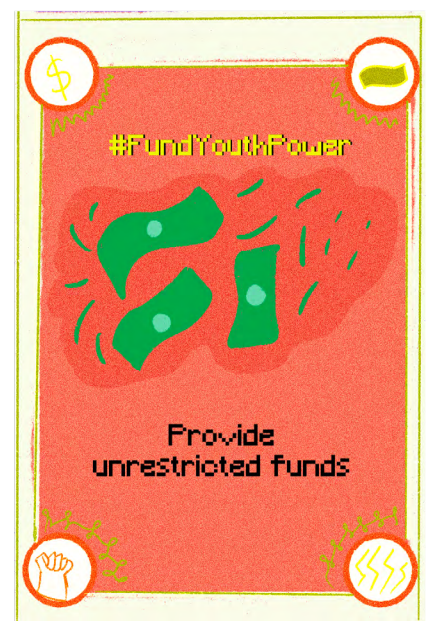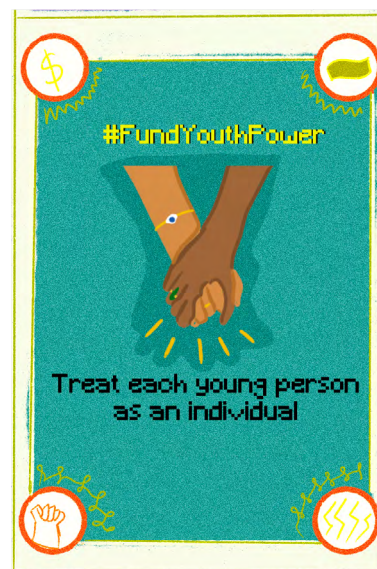

#FundYouthPower
Provide
unrestricted funds

By implementing these 10 principles, funds and partners can better support young people in their vital roles as community developers and activists, ensuring they have the resources and support needed to drive positive change.

#FundYouthPower principle 6

*"They sometimes define training plans which is wrong."*

Treat each young person as an individual. Tailored capacity-building plans should be a priority when supporting youth-led initiatives. Ensuring that young people have access to training and mentoring will increase the sustainability of youth-led organisations and movements. There should be two forms of capacity-building: one that is mandatory and includes financial and programme management and resource mobilisation and the second that is tailored to the specific needs of the youth-led groups and initiatives and is grantee-led.

#FundYouthPower principle 7

"We need more than money."

Invest in young people beyond finances. Support the leadership development of young people from the steering group and the grantees in developing their leadership journeys from the onset, focusing on personal and organizational development. The sustainability of youth-led movements, organisations, and initiatives hinges on the capacity of young people to clearly define their personal, professional, and organizational trajectories. Funders should support the steering group and grantees to map and implement their development plans, and offer training and access to wider networks where needed to create a supportive ecosystem for young people to succeed.
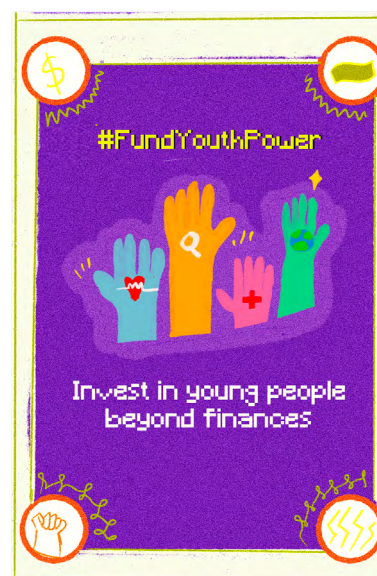
#FundYouthPower principle 8

"Restricted funds usually don't have extra money for wellbeing which is very important."

Prioritise mental health and wellbeing support for young people. The work that young people do often takes a toll on their mental health and well-being. Funders should prioritise mental health and well-being support by providing additional, unrestricted funds explicitly targeted at this kind of support.
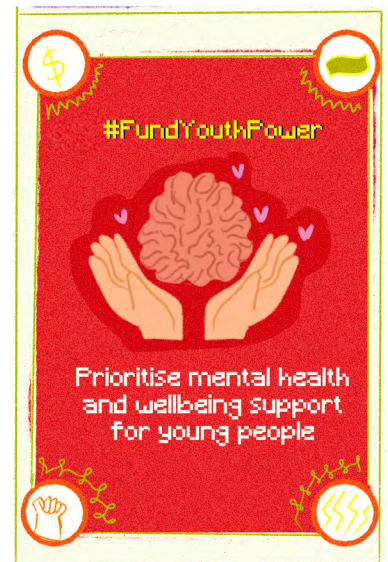
#FundYouthPower principle 9

"The main challenge in maintaining financial sustainability is the unsustainable nature of mainstream funding."

Look to the future. . Develop sustainability plans with the grantees. The funds should invest in supporting the youth-led initiatives and organisations in ensuring sustainability through developing sustainability plans and providing a budget for other income sources, such as impact investment and establishing social enterprises to finance their work. Youth-led initiatives should rely on more than one financial model. A combination of models like grants and fundraising events needs to be explored to diversify income sources.
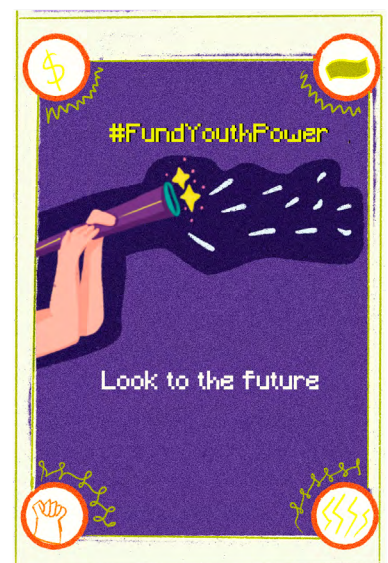
#FundYouthPower principle 10

"At the international stage… they ask for evidence. They might want a website to see what activities you have been conducting or for a Facebook or Twitter page to see what you have been doing and how much impact you have been having. If you can provide this and have the documents, you might be able to get funding."
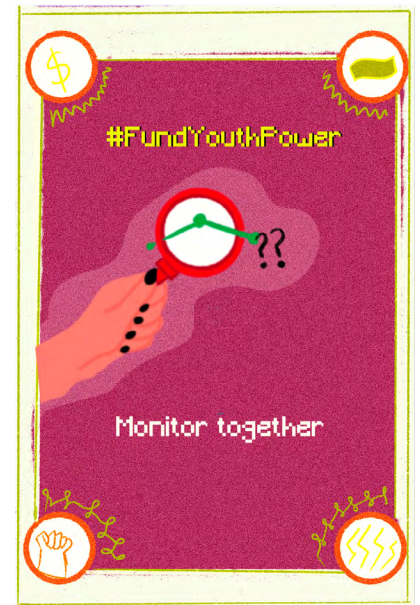
Monitor together. Co-develop monitoring, evaluation, and learning metrics for the fund and the grantees' projects with the grantees and steering group. MEL should be participatory and take a bottom-up approach. The funders should not define impact measurement metrics but co-develop them with young people to ensure relevance and context specificity. Prioritise budget lines to fund this properly, and support young people to gather this evidence over the long term.

By implementing these 10 principles, funds and partners can better support young people in their vital roles as community developers and activists, ensuring they have the resources and support needed to drive positive change.

Conclusion

Young people play an indispensable role in driving community development and activism on both local and international levels. Young people's contributions are essential for advancing social progress and addressing pressing global challenges. However, the findings reveal that young individuals face significant obstacles in accessing both financial and non-financial support, primarily due to the reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and restrictive conditions of alternative funding sources. The research underscores that stringent application processes, top-down management and strict financial requirements exacerbate these challenges. Young people from intersectional backgrounds — such as those who are disabled, LGBTQIA+, from the majority world, refugees, or indigenous — encounter additional barriers related to age, skills access, and capacity training. Despite the potential of crowdsourcing and self-funding, these mechanisms are often insufficient or inaccessible for many young people. Models exist which can be improved and harnessed to ensure that young people are better resourced and supported. These are based on the principles of mutuality, equity, collaboration, and trust. Since 2019, the annual State of Youth Civil Society report has shown us the power and potential of young people, juxtaposed against the barriers and challenges faced by youth civil society. One of the biggest barriers, year after year, is funding. This report presents 10 #FundYouthPower principles which Restless Development believes are crucial to getting money to young people more fairly and in ways that truly shift power for transformative change. The 10 #FundYouthPower principles provide a very clear guide to galvanise and strengthen youth-led change.

If there is one 'call to action' to take from this report, it's a request for funders and partners to use these principles to create a more inclusive and supportive funding environment that acknowledges the diverse needs of young individuals, and maximizes their potential for positive impact.
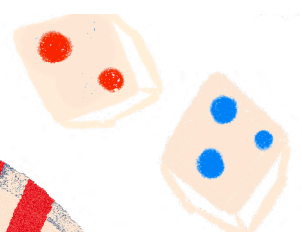
Researcher reflections:

"This research is important because it gives us an opportunity to critically assess funding models and base advocacy on the experiences of grantees.

When we discuss the trust-based model, we need to consider financial guidelines and criteria that can compromise it. There are contractual requirements that not only imply mistrust, but also make it difficult for grantees with specific legal challenges to be able to comply. Trust-based funding should let go of the need to prove that the funds were spent appropriately, and instead focus on the funds being disbursed appropriately and not reinforce already existing social, economic, and legal injustices that grantees from marginalised groups face. This means that the donor and external audit or need to allocate resources for trust-building and mutual involvement in fund disbursement and tracking.

When it comes to unrestricted funding, it is crucial to understand why it is becoming scarce as part of the donor and grantee's context analysis and strategy. A recommendation to implement a mutual process of context analysis is to combine the unrestricted funding model with the trust-based model.

A hybrid model has the chance to be transformative, needs-based, and employs the component of mutual learning in funding disbursement and implementation. One thing to start with is making simple grant applications the rule and not the exception, and making the lives of grantees easier by making financial reporting processes simple and not tedious for activists who feel the need to prove something that they don't have to. In many cases, a fund's financial structure largely restricts programmatic planning and adaptation. This is especially evident in volatile contexts where the creation of change requires freedom in financing, and not just flexibility to move around funds within rigid budget lines. (Nour Nahhas, researcher - Lebanon)

FUNDING

Restless Development Sierra Leone
"The thing I liked is that they place young people at the centre of decision-making; young people set criteria for grant applications and decide on what they are going to do when it comes to financing and making decisions. The young people they work with are into different areas of work so they bring context into the work and ensure there is diverse representation when giving funding to other young people. This makes it unique. Every group of marginalized young people is eligible for their fund and equal opportunities are provided to them. Aside from the flexible funding, technical assistance when it comes to financing and setting up systems is provided to their targeted fund recipients which makes it easy for young people to navigate and excel in their passion and create positive impact."
**- Haja Bangura, researcher - Sierra Leone**

Co-op Foundation, Co-op and #iWill
"It was encouraging to learn about the Young Gamechangers Fund which is delivered via Global Fund for Children and Restless Development. The fund provides UK youth-led organisations with the resources they need to thrive. Restless Development and GFC truly embody the principles of youth empowerment by ensuring that young people are the decision-makers and have the means to create meaningful impact. As a re-granting team, their insights into measuring the value for money in project funding - through aspects like economy, efficiency, and effectiveness - were incredibly valuable. Understanding how to assess these elements will help ensure that every contribution is maximised to achieve the best possible outcomes."

- Yemi Knight, researcher - Barbados
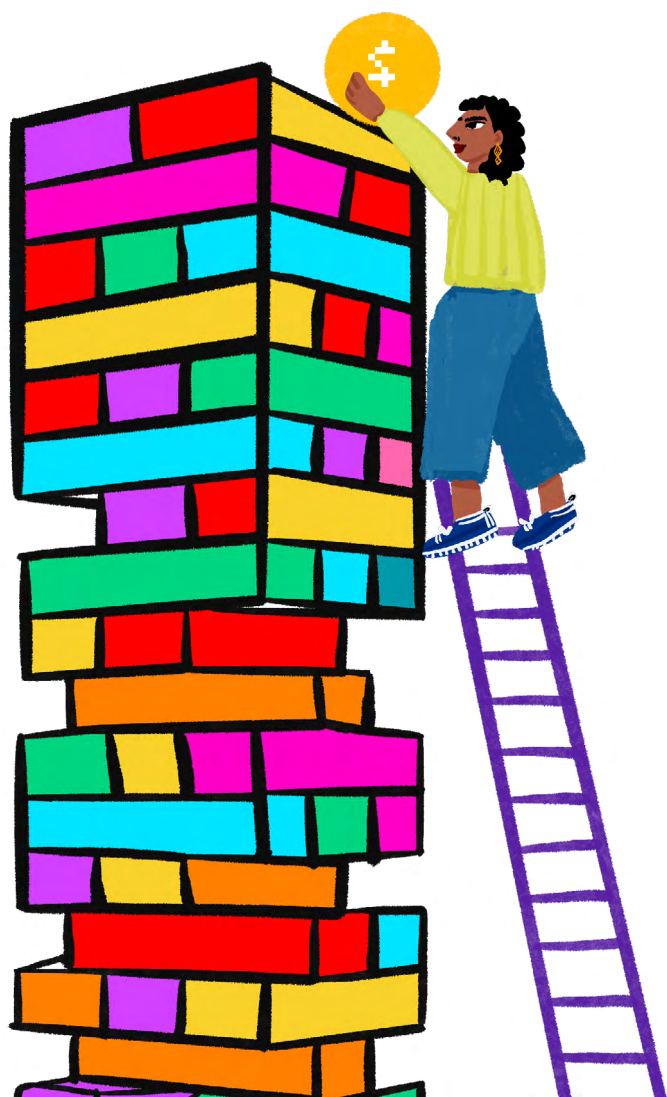
Purposeful

"What makes Purposeful's fund stand out is their exceptional ability to actively listen to young people, truly hear their voices, and collaborate with them to shape a future that is not only sustainable but also equitable and responsive to the varied needs of all youth. Their commitment to co-creating solutions with young people ensures that the impact of their work is both meaningful and lasting. This approach sets a powerful example of how youth-driven change can be achieved when organisations are willing to be flexible, inclusive, and open to the evolving realities faced by young people today."

- Zahra Al Hilaly, researcher - Australia

The Iris Project

"The Iris Project uses a funding model that considers all young people and their circumstances. It funds new ideas and small-scale projects that young people are starting. This includes unestablished organisations- providing support to get them up and running. They also fund young people under 18, which many organisations would not do. This made them stand out to me. It wasn't only about financial support; they also helped with capacity building to help them continue this work after the funding ended. All of the funded youth and organisations are chosen by a youth advisory group, which makes this truly youth-led. This group was very diverse, as there was representation from every continent. Youth are also responsible for creating metrics for evaluation purposes, which was unique for this model. They looked at the trajectory of the projects and how many more youths were in leadership positions, how much more funding they had, and how many more volunteers they had. The overall message from the Iris Project was simple: collaboration was vital, with many people trying to communicate a similar message and bringing people together from around the world."

- Stacie Smith, researcher - Canada

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

"At a personal level, there are many things I liked about the fund, particularly the flexibility of funding models which support young people to work on their own ideas and projects and the inclusion of marginalized people in resourcing models. They are providing mentorship support in the form of financial and legal literacy to young people to access funding and have a focus on the sustainability of projects by empowering young people so that they can run the projects in the long term. They also offer an easy application process."
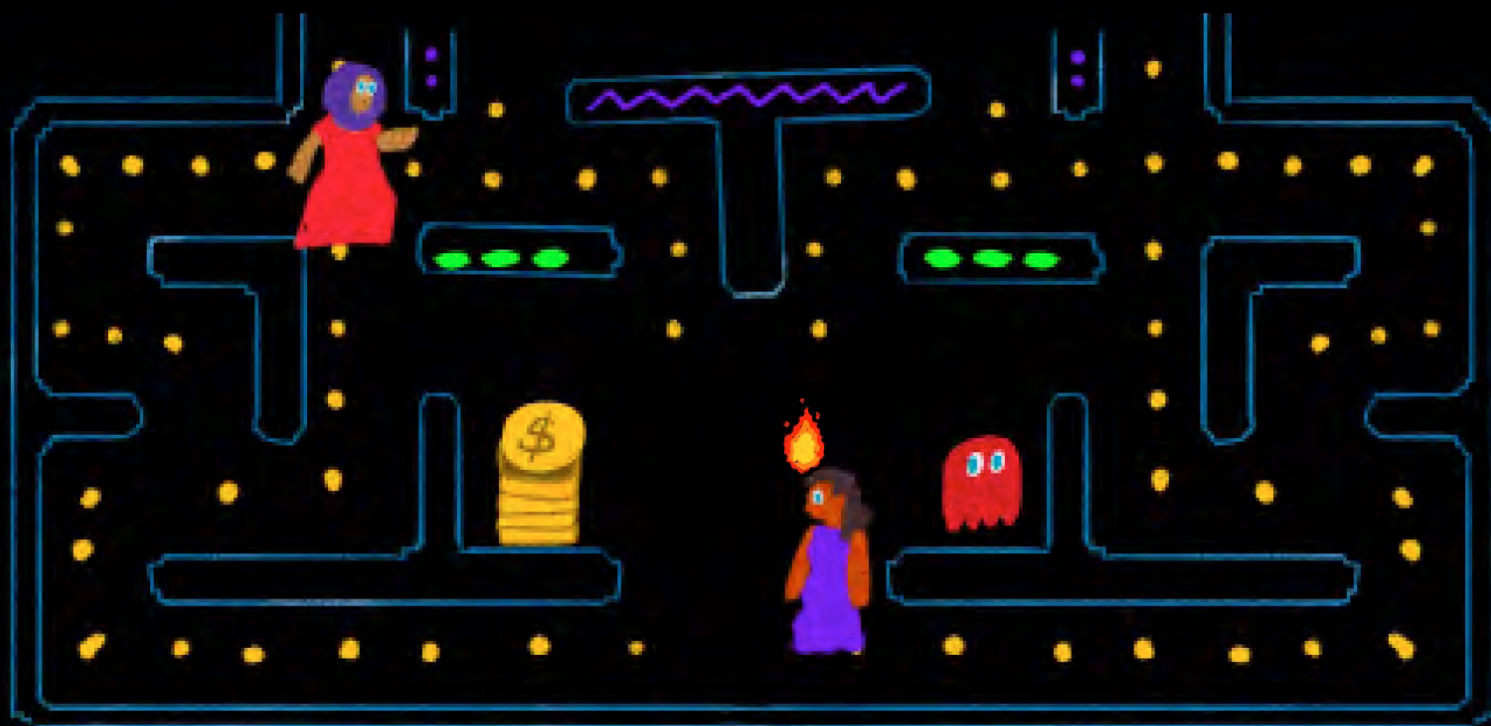
-Himanshu Kumar, researcher- India

African Youth Philanthropy Network

"I was impressed by the proactive steps this fund is taking to enhance the impact and sustainability of youth initiatives. For instance, AYPN's webinar brought together young people from diverse regions to share insights and explore innovative approaches. The webinar yielded valuable ideas, such as leveraging crowdfunding, social media, and blockchain technology. These suggestions highlight the potential for young people to contribute meaningfully to improving resourcing models and driving positive change."

- Kudzai Mutemeri