2024 Leadership Programme

Shift the Power Action Lab Report

the resource alliance

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Introduction

The Resource Alliance Leadership Programme 2024 was co-designed with the participants, based on an extensive consultation with and surveys of leaders across the sector, to ensure the content delivered on the ambition and priorities of the group.

The 2024 programme consisted of four full-group Leadership Summits and six smaller-group Action Labs addressing the topics our community of leaders told us mattered the most to them right now – Innovation, Strategy & People, Climate, and Shifting Power.

The Action Lab covered in this report is Shift the Power group. Over the course of the year, this group met four times online (2-hour meetings) and once in-person for those attending IFC 2024.

In the first Action Lab meeting, the participants used an online Miro board to share the areas of Innovation they would most like to tackle as a group, and then co-created an 'Action Framework' covering their Vision, Goals, Strategies & Measurements, which was then used to guide their work together for the rest of the year.

The next page of this document contains the full Action Framework co-designed by the Action Lab members in **Meeting 1**, then the remainder of the report details their progress in achieving the goals set at the start of the year.

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Leadership Programme 2024
Shift the Power Action Lab

VISION - What is our shared dream?

Our vision is to dismantle the prevailing power imbalances that prioritize Global North perspectives, making "Shift the Power" a reality by implementing systemic changes that promote true collaboration and equity across all levels. Our mission is to tangibly shift power within the not-for-profit sector by fostering genuine collaboration and equitable resource sharing between the Global North and Global South, leading to actionable changes in leadership dynamics and funding practices.

GOALS
How do we make our vision concrete & measurable? How high do we set the bar?

Build and launch a collaborative Shift the Power Advocacy Campaign: Initiate a campaign in collaboration with the ***Climate Action Lab*** to advocate for structural changes that raise local voices, support localized decision-making and direct funding to Global South initiatives. Focus on collaborating with other organisation/s already doing this to ensure we create real impact.

Create a Shared Resource Pool: Establish a repository of tools, case studies, and best practices that promote and support power shifting, particularly in funding and decision-making.

STRATEGIES
What important choices do we make to realise the vision?

Stakeholder Engagement: Engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders including funders, policy makers, and community leaders from both the Global North and South to gain support and input for the advocacy efforts. This will also include identifying and engaging potential allies and champions who can amplify the group's efforts.

Leverage Collective Expertise: Utilize a digital platform to facilitate ongoing communication, resource sharing, and progress tracking among group members. This platform will serve as a central hub for all documents, campaign materials, and discussion forums.

Storytelling and Visibility: Amplify the successes and challenges of shifting power through storytelling, using diverse media to illustrate the impact of equitable practices and local leadership.

MEASUREMENTS
How do we measure our progress once the action areas are identified?

Engagement Metrics: Track participation rates in workshops and other sessions. Measure the active engagement of group members in these activities as an indicator of the group's cohesion and commitment to the objectives.

Group surveys and feedback: Conduct surveys or feedback sessions to assess the progress after each meeting.

Definition of success: Increased engagement and learning within this group on Shift the Power issues. (See the ***Climate Action Lab*** Action Framework for definition of success in terms of the work we are doing in collaboration with them).

ACTIONS
Meetings scheduled to pursue goals

Action Lab Meeting 1
Wed 24 April
10:00 - 12:00 BST

Action Lab Meeting 2
Thu 27 June
09:00 - 11:00 BST

Action Lab Meeting 3
Thu 12 Sept
09:00 - 11:00 BST

IFC In-Person Meeting
TBC

Action Lab Meeting 4
Thu 21 Nov
10:00 - 12:00 GMT

Executive Summary

This report covers how the members of this Action Lab achieved the goals they set themselves at the start of the year through their Action Framework.

On this page, we provide a quick summary of progress against each goal:

Goal 1: Build and launch a collaborative Shift the Power Advocacy Campaign
After the first meeting of the Shift the Power Action Lab, the Lab Leaders realised the Climate Action Lab were pursuing a very similar goal with a clear cross-over between Climate Justice & Shifting Power. Therefore, they decided to work collaboratively on a campaign with the Climate Action Lab. Members from this Shift the Power Action Lab who wanted to contribute to the campaign goal began to attend the Climate Action Lab meetings. As such, a full update on this goal is provided in the Climate Action Lab Report.

Goal 2: Create a Shared Resource Pool
Collaborating with the Climate Action Lab on the campaign work meant that the Shift the Power Action Lab meetings could be fully dedicated to this second goal. The participants invited a guest speaker to every meeting and established a comprehensive repository of tools, case studies, and best practices that promote and support power shifting, particularly in funding and decision-making. The detailed outcomes from meetings 2, 3 and 4, covered on pages 7-19. 12-14, and 17-20 of this report, show how this goal was met throughout the year.

Meeting 2 Agenda

Time	Focus
20 mins	Lab Leader, Ashika Gunasena, sets the scene around Shifting Power in our sector
30 mins	Keynote talk from Clara Bosco Senior Advisor at CIVICUS and Advisory Member to the #ShiftThePower Bogota Summit
20 mins	Open Q&A with Clara Bosco
30 mins	Open discussion to put finishing touches to our Action Framework
20 mins	Next steps for this Action Lab

Meeting 2 Outcomes

Keynote Talk: Power Imbalances in the Aid and Development Sectors
Clara Bosco, Senior Advisor, Civil Society Resourcing, CIVICUS

Introduction and Background:
Clara shared insights on how her organization has been grappling with the **power imbalances** between the Global North and South within the aid and development sectors. She began by providing an overview of CIVICUS' journey in pushing for change in the way civil society is supported, with a focus on how resources are distributed to the Global South and marginalized communities.

Her presentation centered on three key areas:

1. The **structural challenges** that perpetuate power imbalances.
2. The importance of **localizing and decolonizing** aid.
3. How the international aid system can be more effective by **empowering local actors**.

Key Insights

1. **Complex and Rapidly Changing Environment:** Clara highlighted the rapidly evolving context in which civil society operates, noting the increasing complexity of challenges faced by organizations, particularly those in the Global South. The traditional modalities of support and solidarity, she argued, are outdated and must be reimagined to better serve local communities.
2. **Self-Determination and Local Expertise:** One of Clara's central points was the need to support the **right to self-determination** for local communities. She emphasized that local actors, change-makers, and civil society organizations have the best understanding of their needs and context. Therefore, they must be empowered to set their own priorities and decide on the ways they want to develop.
3. **Growing Demands for Shifting Power:** Clara discussed the growing calls from the Global South for a shift in power and the **localization of aid.** Over the past eight years, there has been increasing pressure on the aid infrastructure and philanthropic organizations to decolonize and provide a more enabling environment for civil society.
4. **The Limitations of Donor Commitments**: While Clara acknowledged some progress, such as donor commitments to **local-led development**

she was critical of how vague these commitments often are. She pointed out that many of these donor pledges remain abstract and do not translate into meaningful action. The majority of funding, she noted, still flows through intermediaries rather than directly to local organizations, perpetuating inequalities.

5. **Persistent Access Barriers**: Despite efforts to surface and address barriers, Clara explained that access to funding remains highly unequal. Smaller, grassroots organizations, particularly those in marginalized regions, face numerous obstacles to accessing resources. These barriers include knowing about funding opportunities, meeting onerous application processes, and qualifying for the funds.
6. **The Importance of Flexible Funding**: Clara emphasized the need for **core funding** and **flexible program funding**. She mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic briefly led to more flexible funding from donors, but this trend has since reversed. The stringent requirements that accompany funding are often disproportionate to the amounts received, making it difficult for organizations to function sustainably.
7. **Competition and Fragmentation in the Sector:** A significant concern raised by Clara was how the **competition for resources** has created fragmentation within civil society. Organizations have had to adopt a mindset of scarcity, which has weakened collaboration and broken trust within the sector. This competition undermines the sector's ability to effect long-term, meaningful change.
8. **Building Trust and Collaboration:** Clara stressed that the aid ecosystem needs to shift from a **transactional** and **extractive** approach to one that is relational and transformative. This shift would foster **collaboration** and **trust** between local organizations and international actors, leading to more sustainable and impactful change.

CIVICUS' Approach to Shifting Power

1. **Civil Society Resourcing Workstream:** Clara described how CIVICUS has integrated a dedicated workstream focused on civil society resourcing. This initiative aims to leverage the organization's networks to push for better and more equitable distribution of resources, especially to smaller and less formal grassroots organizations in the Global South.
2. **Shift the Power Movement:** Clara talked about CIVICUS' involvement with the **Shift the Power movement**, which has been gaining traction in recent years. This movement advocates for the inclusion of local actors in key decision-making spaces and aims to ensure that those on the front lines of change are given a seat at the table.
3. **Co-Creation and Horizontal Decision-Making:** CIVICUS has embraced **co-creation** as a core practice, working with grassroots change-makers to co-design campaigns, research, and resource-sharing mechanisms.

Clara highlighted how co-creating solutions with local actors has been a transformational process for both CIVICUS and the grassroots groups they work with.
4. Prototyping Resourcing Models: In response to the need for more equitable funding mechanisms, CIVICUS has piloted several **resourcing models** that prioritize grassroots organizations. These models have been co-created with a cross-section of civil society actors and tested to ensure their viability.
5. Local Leadership Lab: Clara introduced the **Local Leadership Lab**, a new initiative aimed at tackling the political, behavioral, and technical barriers that prevent governments and donors from recognizing and resourcing local civil society actors. This initiative creates spaces for traditionally excluded groups to come together, analyze their context, and formulate collective demands.

Q&A and Further Discussion

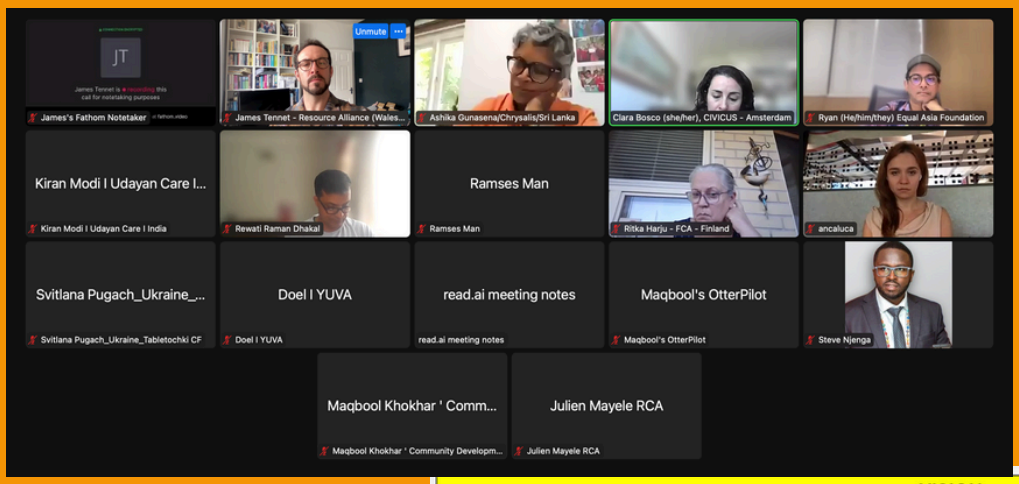
1. Accountability of Donors: During the Q&A, Clara emphasized the need for greater **accountability** from donors who have made public commitments to shifting power and resourcing local organizations. She advocated for creating mechanisms that would allow civil society to **monitor** and **report** on the progress donors are making in fulfilling their pledges.
2. Building Ecosystems of Solidarity: Clara concluded by stressing the importance of building **ecosystems of solidarity** that are centered on the needs and visions of local groups. These ecosystems should focus on mutual understanding, trust-building, and unlearning the competitive practices that currently dominate the sector.

Key Takeaways for the Shift the Power Lab

Clara Bosco's presentation aligns closely with the **Shift the Power Action Lab's** goals, particularly in its focus on:

- **Empowering local actors** and **self-determination** for communities in the Global South.
- Advocating for **flexible and long-term funding** that addresses the real needs of civil society groups.
- Promoting **co-creation** and **horizontal decision-making** processes in the development sector.
- Ensuring **accountability** from international donors who have committed to shifting power but have not yet followed through in a meaningful way.

Meeting 2 Visuals



VISION

What is our shared dream?

Vision: Our vision is to dismantle the prevailing power imbalances that prioritize Global North perspectives, making "Shift the Power" a reality by implementing systemic changes that promote true collaboration and equity across all levels.
Mission Statement: To tangibly shift power within the not-for-profit sector by fostering genuine collaboration and equitable resource sharing between the Global North and Global South, leading to actionable changes in leadership dynamics and funding practices by the end of the program year.

GOALS

How do we make our vision concrete and measurable? How high do we set the bar?

1. **Build and launch a collaborative Shift the Power Advocacy Campaign:**

   Initiate a campaign targeting major international donors and policy platforms to advocate for structural changes that support localized decision-making and direct funding to Global South initiatives. Focus on collaborating with another organisation/s already doing this to ensure we create real impact.

Sub-goal: Create a Shared Resource Pool: Establish a repository of tools, case studies, and best practices that promote and support power shifting, particularly in funding and decision-making.

Group 1 feedback:
Enhance something that is pre-existing.
"Our group's goal is to build and launch a collaborative Shift the Power Advocacy Campaign. Have we considered joining

STRATEGIES

What important choices do we make to realise the vision?

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders including funders, policy makers, and community leaders from both the Global North and South to gain support and input for the position paper and advocacy efforts. This will also include identifying and engaging potential allies and champions who can amplify the group's efforts.
2. **Digital Platform for Collaboration:** Utilize a digital platform to facilitate ongoing communication, resource sharing, and progress tracking among group members. This platform will serve as a central hub for all documents, campaign materials, and discussion forums.
3. **Storytelling and Visibility:** Amplify the successes and challenges of shifting power through storytelling, using diverse media to illustrate the impact of equitable practices and the importance of local leadership.

MEASUREMENTS

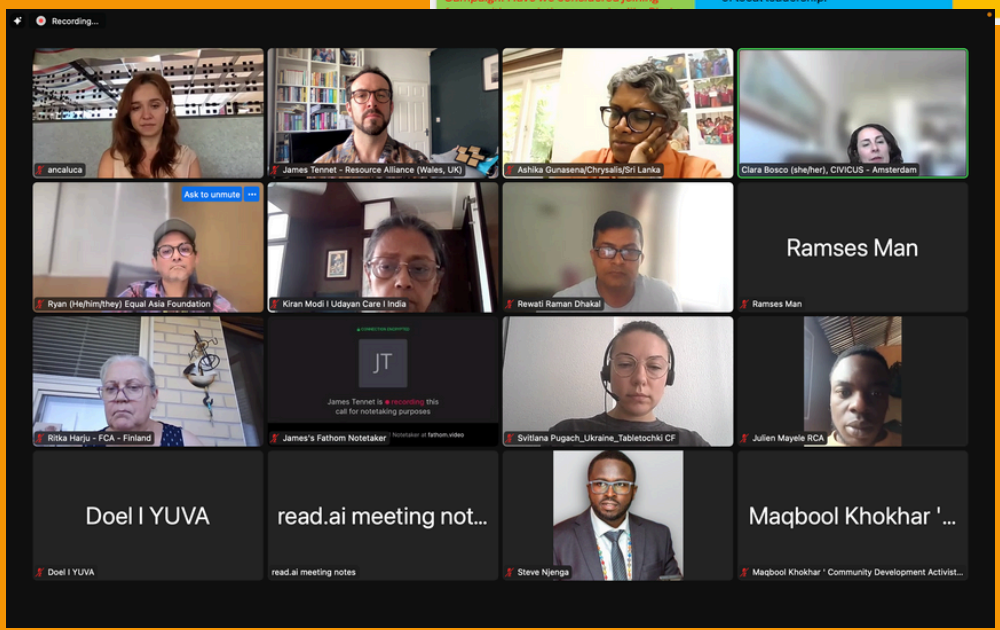
How do we measure our progress?

1. **Engagement Metrics:** Track participation rates in workshops and other sessions. Measure the active engagement of group members in these activities as an indicator of the group's cohesion and commitment to the objectives.
2. **Group surveys and feedback:** Conduct surveys or feedback sessions to assess the progress after each meeting.
3. **Longer-term measurement - Advocacy Impact:** Measure the reach and influence of the advocacy campaign through metrics such as the number of policy discussions influenced, statements of support from key stakeholders, and changes in funding practices as reported by group members and their networks.
4. **Definition of success**
   - Reach and influence of the advocacy campaign
   - Stakeholders that buy into campaign

ACTIONS

What exactly are we going to do? When? Who is responsible?

1. **Action Lab Meeting 2**
   Thu 27 June, 09:00-11:00 (BST)
2. **Action Lab Meeting 3**
   Thu 12 Sept, 09:00-11:00 (BST)
3. **IFC In-Person Meeting**
   Tue 22 Oct, 09:00-12:00 (CET)
   NH Conference Centre Leeuwenhorst
4. **Action Lab Meeting 4**
   Thu 21 Nov, 10:00-12:00 (GMT)
5. **Between meetings / other actions**



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Meeting 3 Agenda

Time	Focus
30 mins	Keynote talk from Marie Müller-Koné, Senior Researcher at Bonn International Centre for Conflict
30 mins	Open Q&A with Marie Müller-Koné
45 mins	Group discussion: Defining what we really mean by 'Shift the Power' - naming the barriers

Meeting 3 Outcomes

Keynote Talk: Decolonizing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus
Marie Müller-Koné, Senior Researcher, Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (bicc)

Introduction & Context
Marie shared her insights based on her report about decolonizing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. The HDP Nexus aims to better coordinate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions. Marie's research focused on how this Nexus can be effectively implemented by NGOs from the bottom up, with a specific focus on decolonizing these efforts to ensure local actors in the Global South are genuinely empowered.

BICC and Project Overview
Marie began by providing background on the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC), which focuses on research and policy advice on the dynamics of violent conflicts and their consequences. She outlined the **multidisciplinary approach** BICC takes, covering areas such as **peacebuilding**, **resource conflicts**, and **climate change**. BICC's mission is to foster a more peaceful world by offering applied research and practical advice.

This current project involves collaboration with NGOs like the **International Rescue Committee** and other partners across countries like **Iraq**, **Mali**, and **South Sudan**. The goal is to analyze how these NGOs implement the HDP Nexus and to examine the extent to which local concepts of conflict resolution and peacebuilding are integrated into the design and implementation of international aid efforts.

Key Findings on Decolonizing the HDP Nexus

1. **Colonial Legacies in the Aid System:** Marie pointed out that the HDP Nexus, while designed to coordinate humanitarian, development, and peace efforts, continues to reflect colonial legacies. Key areas of concern include:
- **Power Imbalances:** Decision-making remains concentrated in **Western donor organizations** and UN institutions, often sidelining local actors and NGOs in the Global South.
- **Structural Racism**: Local staff in conflict-affected regions often bear the greatest risks and burdens, yet they lack decision-making power in project design and implementation.

- **Top-Down Design**: Projects are typically designed in a **top-down** manner, with limited input from local communities. This undermines the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

2. **Lack of Local Involvement**: Marie's research found that in many cases, local communities and NGOs are not sufficiently involved in designing and implementing HDP Nexus projects. For example, she cited research from Iraq, Mali, and South Sudan, where local conflict resolution mechanisms were often ignored, and project activities were not adequately monitored for their impact on local conflicts. This lack of **local ownership** results in interventions that are not sustainable in the long term.

3. **Funding Gaps:** Another critical issue raised was the persistent funding gap. Only **1-4% of humanitarian funding** goes directly to local actors, despite the **Grand Bargain** commitment in 2016 to allocate 25% of funds to local organizations by 2020. This gap reflects ongoing structural inequalities in the distribution of resources.

Policy Recommendations to Decolonize the HDP Nexus

Marie presented several policy recommendations for decolonizing the HDP Nexus:

- **Increase Decision-Making Power for Local Staff:** Local staff should be hired in key decision-making roles at national, regional, and headquarters levels. This would reduce the reliance on expatriates, who should only be recruited in exceptional cases where local expertise is unavailable.
- **Valuing Local Expertise:** Local knowledge—such as familiarity with **power relations, local conflicts, languages,** and **geography**—should be prioritized as much as technical expertise. This would help ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and grounded in local realities.
- **Reflexivity and Overcoming Racism:** Aid organizations need to engage in critical self- reflection to address **structural racism** and prejudices that persist within their operations. She emphasized the need for a **mental shift** in how local actors are perceived, moving away from seeing them as biased and incompetent to recognizing their essential role in conflict resolution.
- **Capacity Sharing**: Instead of talking about "capacity building," she suggested using the term "capacity sharing." This language shift recognizes that local actors already possess critical capacities, and the process should be about mutual learning rather than one-sided training.
- **Equal Working Conditions**: Marie stressed the importance of providing **equal working conditions** for local and expatriate staff. Local staff often face higher security risks but are compensated at much lower rates than their expatriate counterparts. Addressing the **pay gap** is crucial to creating more equitable working conditions.

- **Language Barriers**: International organizations often require local staff to speak English or French, limiting opportunities for highly qualified staff who are not fluent in these languages. Marie called for expatriates to develop proficiency in **local languages** to better engage with communities.

Q&A Discussion Summary

During the Q&A session, participants engaged with Marie on several key points:

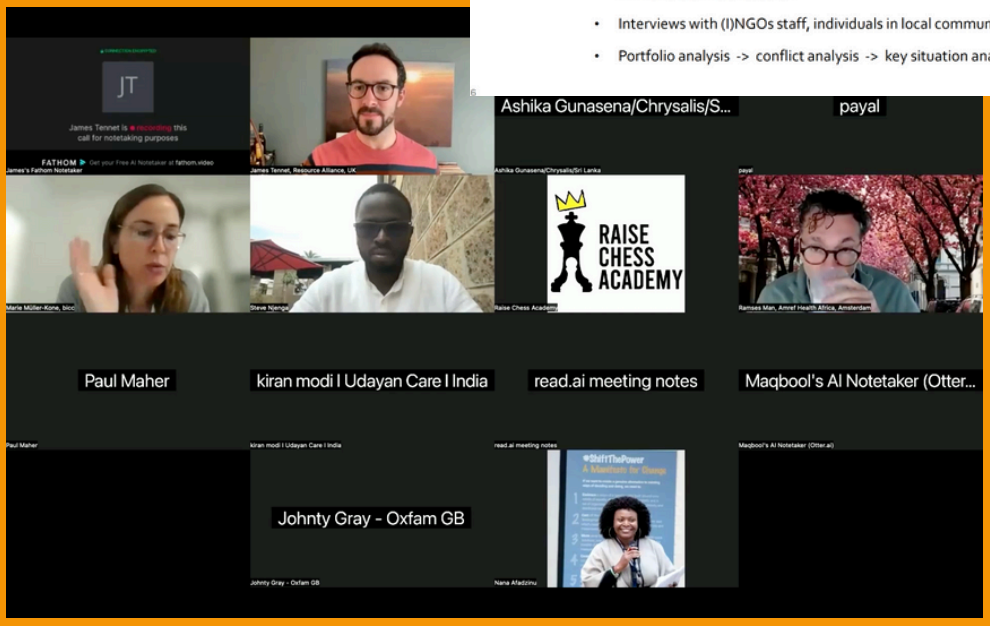
- **Structural Barriers**: Some participants raised concerns about the structural barriers within donor organizations that perpetuate inequalities. Marie agreed that many of the **donor reporting mechanisms** and **funding structures** are designed to maintain control in the hands of the Global North, making it difficult to create truly equitable partnerships.
- **Accountability**: There was a discussion around the need for **downward accountability** to local communities, rather than upward accountability to donors. Marie emphasized that reporting structures should be redesigned to prioritize the needs and voices of affected communities.
- **Application in Crisis Contexts**: Participants also asked about how to apply these decolonization principles in conflict zones where local actors face heightened risks. Marie responded by highlighting the importance of creating **safe spaces** for local actors to participate in decision-making and ensuring they have the necessary resources and support.

Key Takeaways for the "Shifting Power" Lab

Marie's presentation provides several actionable insights for the **Shift the Power Action Lab**, aligning with the group's vision of **dismantling power imbalances**:

1. **Increasing Local Decision-Making Power:** Marie's emphasis on **localizing decision- making** and reducing reliance on expatriates could serve as a key area of focus for the Lab's efforts to shift power in the non-profit sector.
2. **Addressing Structural Racism:** The Lab can draw from Marie's recommendations on reflexivity and capacity sharing to develop strategies for overcoming structural racism within their own organizations and networks.
3. **Funding and Resource Allocation:** The group can take up Marie's challenge to advocate for more equitable funding distribution, pushing for a higher percentage of resources to be allocated directly to local actors.
4. **Creating Accountability Mechanisms:** Building on the idea of **downward accountability**, the Lab could work on creating tools and frameworks that ensure local communities are at the center of monitoring and evaluation processes.

Meeting 3 Visuals



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Meeting 4 Agenda

Time	Focus
30 mins	Keynote talk from Kate Moger, Global Director of Pledge for Change 2030
30 mins	Open Q&A / Discussion with Kate Moger
20 mins	Reviewing Action Lab progress against Action Framework
10 mins	Final thoughts, thank yous, and next steps

Meeting 4 Outcomes

Keynote Talk: Pledge for Change 2030
Kate Moger, Global Director of Pledge for Change 2030

Introduction & Context
Kate Moger's presentation in the final Shift the Power Action Lab explored the foundations and ambitions of the **Pledge for Change 2030** initiative. She emphasized the need for systemic transformation within the humanitarian aid ecosystem, focusing on equity, accountability, and authentic storytelling.

Pledge for Change Overview

- **Origins**: Kate traced the origins of **Pledge for Change 2030** to widespread frustrations with the **Grand Bargain**, which, while well-intentioned, has struggled to deliver deep structural change in the aid sector. She emphasized that Pledge for Change was born from a recognition of racial inequities and systemic barriers in international aid.
- **Mission and Focus**: The initiative aims to:
  - Shift power from traditional donor-driven models to locally led solutions.
  - Tackle inequities by challenging the dominance of Global North organizations in decision-making processes.
  - Transform fundraising and storytelling practices to dismantle colonial and patriarchal narratives.
- **Broader Goal**: The overarching vision is to create an aid ecosystem that operates on principles of equity, solidarity, humility, and self-determination.

Core Principles and Structure:

- **Key Principles:**
  - **Equitable Partnerships:** Pledge for Change calls for a redefinition of partnerships, where local organizations are seen as equal collaborators, not as subcontractors.
  - **Authentic Storytelling:** Emphasizes reframing how the Global South is depicted in fundraising and communications, avoiding portrayals that perpetuate dependency or victimhood.
  - **Influencing Systemic Change:** Encourages organizations to leverage their platforms to advocate for systemic reform in global aid governance.

- **Stakeholders:**
  - **Signatories:** INGOs that commit to internal transformation, with examples like **Plan International**, which has already made strides in auditing its visual communications.
  - **Supporters:** Civil society organizations, academics, and others who advocate for and amplify the pledge.

Accountability and Feedback:

- **Pledge Accountability and Learning Mechanism (PALM):**
  - **Annual Self-Reporting:** All signatories must report on their progress, with standardized indicators to ensure consistency and transparency.
  - **Partner-Led Evaluation:** Organizations like WACSI are central to designing tools for partner feedback, which are then used to assess INGO performance.
  - **Southern-Led Review Panels:** Panels of representatives from the Global South review campaigns and decisions to ensure alignment with the pledge's principles.
  - **Talk to Loop Platform:** A digital feedback tool that allows direct input from communities receiving aid, bypassing traditional intermediaries.
- **Challenges**:
  - Kate noted the difficulty of reconciling the pledge's principles with traditional donor expectations. For example, storytelling that emphasizes local agency may be less appealing to donors accustomed to dramatic, crisis-focused narratives.
  - Resistance from within organizations that see change as either too risky or not aligned with immediate revenue goals.

Examples of Change in Action:

- Kate highlighted tangible steps taken by signatories:
  - **Plan International**: Revised hiring policies for visual and storytelling projects to ensure local representation.
  - **Adeso**: Actively promoted local leaders to lead projects traditionally directed by INGOs.
  - **Grassroots Campaigning**: Local organizations are now leading advocacy campaigns, which are then amplified by INGO platforms, reversing the traditional hierarchy.
- Kate acknowledged that these examples reflect progress but are still the beginning of a much longer journey.

Role of the Secretariat:

The small team at Adeso provides coordination and support but does not impose policies or structures. Instead, they act as facilitators, connecting organizations and fostering learning across contexts.

Key Themes of Kate's Talk

1. **Decolonizing Humanitarianism:**
   - A central tenet of the pledge is to disrupt power imbalances entrenched in traditional aid models. Kate emphasized that decolonization requires not just funding shifts but also changes in mindset, language, and organizational culture.
2. **Balancing Accountability and Flexibility:**
   - While the initiative's principles are clear, Kate stressed the importance of allowing organizations flexibility in how they implement the pledge, considering their unique challenges.
3. **Transforming Fundraising and Communications:**
   - The pledge directly challenges narratives that reinforce dependency, calling for communications that highlight resilience, agency, and local leadership.
4. **Overcoming Resistance:**
   - Kate acknowledged the inertia within large INGOs, driven by fears of alienating donors or disrupting existing systems. However, she argued that failure to adapt would ultimately make these organizations irrelevant in the face of rising demands for equity and justice.

Summary of the Q&A Discussion

1. **Practical Challenges in Implementation:**
   - Participants asked about overcoming organizational resistance to change. Kate suggested starting with small, visible wins (e.g., revising image libraries or piloting local leadership models) to build momentum.
   - Concerns about donor reactions to altered storytelling approaches were raised. Kate noted that while some donors might resist, others—particularly younger donors—are increasingly valuing ethical transparency.
2. **Shifting Donor Expectations:**
   - Questions arose about how to align donor expectations with equitable storytelling. Kate recommended engaging donors in discussions about the importance of dignity and agency in communications, rather than pandering to outdated crisis-driven narratives.
3. **Amplifying Local Voices:**
   - A recurring theme was how INGOs can create platforms for local leaders to speak directly to global audiences. Kate emphasized the importance of ceding control and using INGO networks to amplify existing grassroots efforts.
4. **Measuring Success:**
   - Kate was asked about how to measure progress. She highlighted the PALM framework as a key accountability tool but also acknowledged the need for qualitative assessments, such as community feedback.

- **Advice for Small Organizations:**
  - Smaller organizations raised concerns about the feasibility of implementing the pledge. Kate suggested focusing on one or two core principles (e.g., equitable partnerships) and building from there, leveraging alliances with larger groups for support.

Conclusion

Kate Moger's talk provided a compelling overview of **Pledge for Change 2030**, aligning perfectly with the **Shift the Power Action Lab's** mission. Her emphasis on equity, authentic storytelling, and systemic reform resonated strongly with participants, who were particularly inspired by the pledge's accountability mechanisms and grassroots focus. The Q&A underscored the challenges of navigating entrenched systems but also revealed optimism about the potential for genuine transformation through collective effort.

Meeting 4 Visuals

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Shift the Power Thought-Piece

Naming the Barriers: Why Shifting the Power in the Non-Profit Sector is So Difficult

Introduction

The call to "Shift the Power" has resonated across the non-profit and social impact sector, urging a re-evaluation of the entrenched power dynamics between the Global North and Global South. Yet, while the intention is clear, the path forward is fraught with challenges. This thought-piece delves into the complexities and barriers that make this shift so difficult to achieve, drawing from recent discussions among sector leaders who participated in the “Shift the Power Lab” Action Lab as part of the Resource Alliance’s 2024 Leadership Programme.

Understanding the Call to Shift the Power

At its core, "Shift the Power" is a demand for a more equitable distribution of resources, decision-making authority, and influence. It calls for a shift from a donor-recipient relationship, often dominated by Global North entities, to one of genuine partnership and collaboration. However, this shift is not just about reallocating funds or changing governance structures; it is about redefining the very fabric of how we understand and engage in social change.

"We need to change the mindset of how development is viewed from a Northern perspective. It’s not about giving up control but about recognizing that local partners often know best what their communities need. The challenge is to make this shift at a cultural and organizational level."
Ashika Gunasena, CEO, Chrysalis

The Problem of Definition

One of the most significant challenges is that even defining what it means to shift the power is complex. For some, it is about transferring financial control. For others, it is about shifting narrative power or decision-making authority. This multiplicity of meanings can dilute the effectiveness of the movement,

making it difficult to build a cohesive strategy. For organizations like Chrysalis, which works to empower marginalized groups in Sri Lanka, the challenge is twofold: shifting power within the global context and addressing local power imbalances that further entrench inequality.

"It's about moving beyond tokenism and really empowering these communities to drive the change they want to see. We need to highlight the importance of local leadership in shaping the development agenda."
Ashika Gunasena, CEO, Chrysalis

Beyond the problem of definition, there is an even deeper fundamental flaw in the use of 'Shift the Power' as a guiding phrase, subtly suggesting the Global South currently has no power and therefore power needs to be shifted into this vacuum. This inherently undervalues and even ignores the power that already exists everywhere in the ecosystem.

Embedded Structures of Power
The social impact sector is not immune to the global power structures that influence all areas of society. These structures are deeply embedded in how organizations are funded, how priorities are set, and even in the language used to describe social issues. Northern institutions often dictate the terms of engagement, leaving little room for authentic local leadership. Even when funding models are adjusted to give more autonomy to Southern partners, the cultural dominance of Northern institutions persists, perpetuating a form of neo-colonialism that stifles true innovation and ownership.

"Even when funding structures change, the mindset and cultural dominance of Northern institutions often persist. We need to develop frameworks that challenge these norms and support a shift towards real partnership."
Ashika Gunasena, CEO, Chrysalis

The Mindset Barrier
Changing power dynamics is not just about structural adjustments; it requires a fundamental shift in mindset. Even the most well-intentioned Northern donors often struggle to let go of control. There is a pervasive paternalism that underlies many funding relationships, where trust is conditional, and autonomy is limited. This can be aptly described as a "mindset barrier"—one that is harder

to dismantle than any policy or structural obstacle. Until the sector collectively addresses this mindset, efforts to shift power will remain superficial.

"It's not about just talking about shifting power; it's about changing the underlying attitudes that keep control in the hands of a few. Without addressing these mindset issues, our efforts will only scratch the surface."
Steve Njenga, Founder and CEO, MoFund Africa

Naming the Barriers
What prevents us from making progress on this issue? Discussions in the Shift the Power Action Lab have identified several entrenched barriers:

- **Financial Dependency**: Many Global South organizations are heavily reliant on Northern funding, which limits their ability to set their own agendas.
- **Narrative Control**: Northern entities often control the narratives around social issues, which can marginalize local voices and perspectives.
- **Accountability Mechanisms**: Donor-driven accountability can undermine local initiatives and prioritize compliance over innovation.
- **Undermining of Local Actor Capacities**: While true in some cases, limited capacities of local actors are often generalised and assumed to be inherent.

Naming these barriers is not about assigning blame but about recognizing the structural and cultural factors that inhibit change. Acknowledging these challenges is the first step toward any meaningful progress.

What Can We Do?
To translate these discussions into action, the Shift the Power Action Lab have identified some key initiatives:

1. Develop and Implement Frameworks:
- *Racial Justice Framework:* Look at addressing systemic issues through a structured approach. This framework can help guide our efforts in shifting power dynamics by providing a clear, actionable path for organizations to follow.
- *Language Framework:* We need to change the language used in the sector to eliminate paternalistic terms and adopt a vocabulary that empowers local leadership.

"Our goal is to shift away from the paternalistic language that often dominates discussions and to adopt terms that empower and validate local leadership"
Julien Kanyonga, Founder & Executive Director, Raise Chess Academy

2. Engage and Empower Local Voices:

- *Grassroots Involvement*: Moving beyond token consultation to genuine empowerment, where local communities lead the change they want to see.

"We're actively engaging with women's groups in the tea plantations, not just to consult but to ensure they are leading the initiatives."
Ashika Gunasena, CEO, Chrysalis

- *Formal Engagement Strategies*: Establishing regular, structured engagements with local leaders as a way to ensure consistent and meaningful involvement. This would involve regular meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared decision-making.

3. Leverage Advocacy Platforms:

- *Utilizing Existing Platforms*: Blogs, conferences, and social media are all powerful mediums through which to advocate for these changes.

"It's not enough to discuss these issues internally; we have to bring them to the wider sector and push for systemic change."
Julien Kanyonga, Founder & Executive Director, Raise Chess Academy

4. Concrete Actions at the Grassroots Level:

- *Pilot Projects*: Implementing pilot projects that prioritize local leadership and autonomy in decision-making, such as leadership training and financial literacy programs.
- *Tracking Existing Projects:* We should also capture the change that has already happened or is ongoing.

The Way Forward:
While the ultimate goal of shifting power is ambitious, the path forward must begin with honest, open dialogue. It requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about privilege, control, and the role that all actors —

donors, NGOs, and community leaders— play in maintaining the status quo. It is not enough to tweak funding models or adjust governance structures; we must also challenge the deeper assumptions and biases that shape the sector.

Conclusion:
"Shift the Power" is more than just a slogan; it is a call to fundamentally reimagine how we engage in social change. The barriers are significant, and progress will be slow. But by naming these challenges and committing to ongoing dialogue, we can begin to lay the groundwork for a more just and equitable sector. Only by acknowledging and addressing these barriers can we hope to make the shift from rhetoric to reality.

"It is not necessarily about finding immediate solutions but about being willing to ask the hard questions and to sit with the discomfort that comes from confronting our own complicity in these dynamics."
Ashika Gunasena, CEO, Chrysalis

Conclusion & Next Steps

The "Shift the Power" Action Lab has made meaningful progress toward dismantling entrenched power imbalances in the nonprofit sector, addressing both structural and cultural barriers. Through a series of collaborative sessions, keynote talks and thought leadership, the Lab has deepened the sector's understanding of what it takes to create equitable partnerships and amplify local voices.

One of the Lab's core goals—**building a collaborative advocacy campaign**—was taken forward in collaboration with the **Climate Action Lab**, a decision that allowed the Shift the Power Action Lab to use their meeting time to solely focus on their second goal: **creating a shared resource pool.**

By dedicating its efforts to this objective, the Lab successfully established a repository of tools, case studies, and best practices to support the shift toward equitable resource allocation and decision-making. This report represents that repository and will be a valuable asset for the wider nonprofit community.

Keynote talks from sector leaders Clara Bosco, Marie Müller-Koné, and Kate Moger enriched the Lab's discussions, providing actionable insights into decolonizing aid systems, localizing decision-making, and redefining partnerships. Their perspectives inspired the group to explore tangible ways to integrate equity and accountability into organizational practices. These discussions culminated in the publication of a thought-piece, "Naming the Barriers," which captures the complexities of shifting power and offers a roadmap for addressing systemic challenges. The publication of this thought-piece to the full Resource Alliance Global Community was very well received.

The Lab has laid the groundwork for a broader conversation about equity, solidarity, and collaboration. The shared vision of fostering genuine partnerships between the Global North and South continues to guide this work, with plans to further disseminate the group's findings and resources through the Resource Alliance network. While the Lab's formal meetings have concluded, the tools and insights developed over the past year will serve as a catalyst for further action, empowering organizations to confront inequities and foster systemic change.

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