

Building the New: Reimagining Civil Society Resourcing in Times of Global Transformation

Offered to the field from:

Bridging Dialogues

at  Global Dialogue



 MINISTARSTVO
PROSTORA



Bridging Dialogues (UK), Dalia Association (Palestine), Global Fund for Community Foundations (UK / South Africa), Indonesia for Humanity (Indonesia), Ministry of Space (Serbia) and Navsarjan (India)

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>How Traditions of Solidarity Can Rebuild Community Agency Eroded through Aid Dependency</u>	5
<u>How Everyday Acts of Mutual Support Can Form the Real Infrastructure of Civic Life</u>	8
<u>How Courage and Political Clarity Can Sustain Struggles in Contexts of Repression</u>	11
<u>How a New Economic Imagination May Help Movements Reclaim Agency and Construct More Just and Solidarity-Based Alternatives</u>	15
<u>About the Contributing Organizations</u>	19

Introduction

This report is based on a virtual session held on 30 October 2025 – a year that laid bare the fragility of the global funding ecosystem as we have known it. Yet this moment is not entirely new. For years, traditional funding models and NGO structures have proven inadequate, extractive, and disconnected from grassroots realities. In response, organizations and movements across the world working in pursuit of more just, equitable, and peaceful societies have been reimagining how social change is resourced – shifting the focus from money alone to questions of power, voice, and agency. Many of us are looking within communities, drawing on creativity and long-held traditions of solidarity to understand how we endure, resist, and thrive in a time of profound global challenge.

The session “Building the New: Reimagining Civil Society Resourcing in Times of Global Transformation” was created as a space to explore these alternatives – to listen deeply to activists, grassroots foundations, and community organizers who are already reshaping civil society in fundamental ways. Rather than looking to international systems for legitimacy or rescue, their work is instead grounded in community sovereignty, collective agency, and everyday acts of solidarity.

The discussion brought together 80 participants, with four speakers offering grounded perspectives from Palestine, Serbia, India, and Indonesia – contexts marked by violence, shrinking civic space, economic hardship, political repression, and the disappearance of aid, yet also by practices of dignity, interdependence, and courage. Speakers included:

- Nour Nusseibeh, [Dalia Association](#) (Palestine)
- Marko Aksentijević, [Ministry of Space](#) (Serbia)
- Martin Macwan, [Navsarjan](#) (India)
- Kamala Chandrakirana, [Indonesia for Humanity](#) (Indonesia)

The session was hosted by [Bridging Dialogues](#), the Dalia Association, and the [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#) (GFCF). The four sections that follow present an edited and abridged version of the dialogue with the contributors, which was facilitated by Jenny Hodgson (GFCF). For readability, some contributions have been shortened and re-ordered while retaining the original meaning and spirit of the dialogue.

Together, these contributions explore:

- How traditions of solidarity can rebuild community agency eroded through aid dependency.
- How everyday acts of mutual support can form the real infrastructure of civic life.
- How courage and political clarity can sustain struggles in contexts of repression.
- How a new economic imagination may help movements reclaim agency and construct more just and solidarity-based alternatives.

Importantly, the session was not designed to provide definitive answers, but to begin a conversation about what comes next. Together, we are asking: **What are the alternatives? What**

becomes possible when we shift our attention away from the dominant logics of big aid and big grants? What emerges when we stop seeing resources as charity and instead understand them as solidarity – rooted in dignity, interdependence, and the imagination of communities themselves?

We invite you to join us in this conversation.

How Traditions of Solidarity Can Rebuild Community Agency Eroded through Aid Dependency

Nour Nusseibeh shares her perspective from the midst of an ongoing genocide and from years of community-rooted work at the Dalia Association in Palestine.

Nour’s reflections illuminate how aid has reshaped Palestinian civil society, leading to fragmentation and dependency, and why returning to cultural practices of solidarity offer a meaningful alternative.

Jenny Hodgson (JH): When we were thinking about this conversation around reimagining and looking ahead to the future, we first turned to you Nour, as you are sitting in Palestine in the midst of a genocide. The Dalia Association has also undertaken an important piece of work looking at long-standing traditions of solidarity and giving in Palestine [see the paper [Community Philanthropy in the Palestinian Context: Concepts, Alternatives and Challenges](#)]. Can you tell us a bit about the context for that work and why you felt it was so important to do at this time? Please also say a few words about Dalia itself, an organization that has been swimming against the tide of a dominant system for some time now.

Nour Nusseibeh (NN): Thank you. In this time, these spaces where we can collectively and safely reimagine the kind of civil society we want in Palestine are important. It’s not about creating something new – alternatives have existed in our culture for a while, but this moment demands that we raise our voices more boldly. Even with a ceasefire, we are still living through the consequences of the genocide and its impacts across our communities. As well as a global resourcing model that has been failing us all for many years.

Over the last 20 years, we have witnessed a steady reduction in the power of local actors to drive change. Our voices are increasingly dominated by a donor driven agenda. This is why within the [Giving for Change programme](#) we began to ask ourselves: What is the alternative we want? How do we want to redesign the system? These questions led Dalia to publish a [short piece of research on community philanthropy in the Palestinian context](#). In it, we explore the concepts, alternatives, and challenges that we have faced because of the aid system and the colonial context in which we live, as well as the dominance of what one might call “politicized” funding. These forces have created dependency, fragmented community work, and pushed us into a model where decisions are driven not by the community but by donors.

Through the research process, we realized how much we have lost in terms of justice, and the rights of our own people to make decisions that shape change. This is the context we are living in – not only during the current genocide, but long before October 2023. For years, there has been deep control over people’s decision-making and over communities’ ability to set their own priorities. And the truth is simple: if we do things that are not relevant to what the community

needs, it will leave no impact. This is visible in many different contexts, but in the Palestinian context it is especially and painfully clear.

One of the main pillars that emerged from this work is that we need to go back to our roots, to our culture, our norms, and the ways that we have historically worked collectively for change. One expression of this in Palestine is *Al Ouneh*, which means philanthropy, giving, solidarity and support, and which rests on trust and accountability. This is the model through which we imagine change. It's not just an idea: at Dalia, we have been working with it for more than 20 years, and today we see this being replicated in Palestine as an alternative.

One of the main pillars that emerged from this work is that we need to go back to our roots, to our culture, our norms, and the ways that we have historically worked collectively for change.

In the research we also describe some of the challenges we face — especially the challenge of convincing people that the aid system is not enabling them to do what they want. Instead, it is driving communities down paths they did not choose. We explored this further in a [recent article on conditional funding and the famine](#) in Gaza after the genocide. This piece reinforces the same conclusion, i.e. the need to revive our cultural practices and the roots of *Al-Ouneh*. One of the major recommendations of the research is how we can approach development based on trust and accountability, on giving and solidarity, moving away from a broken aid system towards philanthropy and change.

JH: Palestine has been in a state of extreme crisis for the last couple of years, yet one of the key insights of the research is relevant to a wider context. This is the idea that external aid, which was supposed to help and build civil society has instead contributed to its “professionalization”, which has shifted it further away from the people it is meant to serve. At the same time, traditions of giving and solidarity, what people know, how they have organized in the past, have not just been overlooked, they have also been actively undermined by the systems and structures of aid. This also feels like a profoundly political framing: if you want to build your own autonomy, you have to start with what you've got and build from there. With the implication being that external resources then builds on that. As the report notes, it's not about a complete rejection of a system, but rather finding the appropriate interplay between the historical legacy and the realities of the present moment.

NN: What you have just said is very relevant. Despite all the different challenges we face all around the world, what ultimately matters at the end of the day is the decision of the people and how we choose to reorganize ourselves. Aid and philanthropy should come *after* that, supporting the resilience and liberation that grows from our own decisions.

JH: Palestine has endured profound trauma — genocide, war — for the last two years. You have urgent, daily work to do. People rely on you. Communities are surviving day-by-day. How do you hold on to the big picture in all this? What supports would help you to hold that vision and not get caught up in the hamster wheel of just doing the work?

NN: Actually, it is the aid system that pushes us onto the hamster wheel, to run after resources, forcing you to implement and spend, even when the resources are very limited. And yet there will be a time when there will be no resources left. So, we need to build something different.

That is what we mean when we talk about the “alternative” – the idea that sovereignty matters, people’s willingness to live in community, in liberation, and with dignity is what holds up our humanity. This is what we need to protect.

In the early days of the genocide in Gaza, we were talking with different groups – youth groups, women’s groups, etc. – and thinking together with them how we can make change. And one woman who had been very active with us before the war said something I will never forget, even now, two years later. She said: “Everyone is looking to open community kitchens just to feed people, but if I had seeds, I would be happy and I would be surviving. Because if you're giving me bread today, you won't be giving me bread tomorrow. However, if you give me seeds, I will sustain not only myself, but also my family, friends, and neighbours.”

That is what we mean when we talk about the “alternative” – the idea that sovereignty matters, people’s willingness to live in community, in liberation, and with dignity is what holds up our humanity. This is what we need to protect.

How Everyday Acts of Mutual Support Can Form the Real Infrastructure of Civic Life

Serbia's recent youth-led uprising reveals both the limits of donor-driven systems and the strength of everyday solidarity. Marko Aksentijević from the Ministry of Space in Belgrade describes how trust, solidarity, and self-organizing are offering a new paradigm for the future of Serbian civil society.

JH: Marko, would you like to tell us a little bit about your story and how you're seeing the world right now, from where you sit? Obviously, Serbia is going through its own Gen Z moment. Over the last year, following the collapse of the [canopy at a railway station in Novi Sad](#), students and young people have maintained consistent protests in ways that have been very impressive. Can you talk about this idea of “the moment for reimagining and reflection”, and also share a little bit about the Ministry of Space?

Marko Aksentijević (MA): Thank you, Jenny, for including me in this conversation. This whole discussion is very relevant for us right now: we are facing a multi-layered crisis. We struggle both with the availability of funding to sustain the work of the organization and broader civil society and, at the same time, also with the larger question of whether this whole approach has been meaningful and productive for society. In Serbia, civil society was largely built in the 1990s, with the support of Western governments to help topple the autocratic regime of Milošević. Yet, 25 years later, we find ourselves with another autocrat in power. Not only has the international backing of democratic reform failed, but today it is also not organized civil society that stands as the pillar of the resistance – it's the student movement, leaderless and very effective. This must make one question the whole development paradigm and everything we have been doing, and echoes with what Nour has just said.

We too were often guided by the idea that institutions can be reformed with advocacy efforts, an idea that was at the heart of the money that we were receiving. The Ministry of Space belongs to the second generation of organizations that were made to be different, more connected to the constituency than the organizations that were active for 25 years. We focused on making local groups achieve institutional success in the realm of spatial development in the easiest possible way. But we also fell into the traps of institution driven indicators and policy change, rather than working with our communities and building the kind of power that will ultimately be the guardrails of democracy once the institutions start to crumble, which is what we are experiencing now. When you look at all the work that went into trying to improve institutions and you see the current state of affairs, you must wonder what went wrong.

What has proved to be worthwhile and is now paying off in this time of crisis are things like physical infrastructure – the physical spaces such as the independent social and cultural centres that are now serving as hubs for organizing during this mass mobilization. For our organization, it turns out that our most meaningful work has not been around urban development critique and advocacy, but rather organizing and spreading this culture of neighbourhood assemblies, coming together in times of crisis and talking about what matters.

For us, it began as the way of mobilizing around spatial development in a neighbourhood, but now it is country-wide infrastructure that supports the student movement and develops a much-needed culture of dialogue.

For years there has always been this idea that we had to get funding from abroad, because there is no “culture of giving” in Serbia. But these protests have sparked the “culture of giving” in unprecedented ways – people give when there is a sense of meaning. In fact, at times the student movement has had to ask people to stop donating because they cannot process all of the contributions. Some of the most powerful and remarkable images of the mobilization for the past year have been of students making these long marches from one city to another, and people offering them food and shelter, or just a couple of apples because that is what they have to give. This might not be “resource mobilization” in the most technical sense, but it represents exactly the kind of civil society we need and want to reimagine.

I hope that there is no return of the development aid system as it was, because in many ways it derailed genuine democratic processes...Instead, we really need to rebuild from the resources that are in our communities. And there are indeed enough resources.

So, we are now deeply rethinking what our role should be and how it should be dramatically reconsidered in a way that can bring more meaningful change. I hope that there is no return of the development aid system as it was, because in many ways it derailed genuine democratic processes, at least in terms of countries on the periphery like Serbia. Instead, we really need to rebuild from the resources that are in our communities. And there are indeed enough resources.

JH: Thank you, Marko. You are describing how in Serbia, young people have actually been bypassing large parts of the traditional civil society infrastructure, which has perhaps historically had its eye on the wrong prize (ie. funding policy shifts, rather than community energy and participation). You have also challenged what we at the GFCF have long been told – that local resources “don’t really matter”, that they are small, marginal, something to think about later. But when young people walk across the country and villagers hand them three apples because that is what they have to give, that is the work. It forces us to ask: what have we been measuring, if this kind of solidarity itself somehow doesn’t “count”?

What you’ve shared reminds us too of the power of physical spaces – the places where people can come together, organize, and simply be in community with each other. That feels absolutely critical right now. And it invites us to question so much of what we have inherited: civil society in Serbia was built at a particular moment, under a particular global political project. As we mourn the loss of systems that are fading, we also need to ask – were those structures ever truly the right ones? Your point around if aid comes back, let it not come back like before, is incredibly important. We should be thinking about how we prepare and ensure that whatever comes back is substantially different. Thank you for that.

MA: For me the foremost question is: how do we take time to step back and reflect on what happened? One of the things that always kept us from doing this reflective work has been that there is always a crisis. There is always a lot happening in city development – a lot of individual problems and incidents, with communities all over the city gathering around them to protest and engage in whatever is necessary. So, we are basically firefighters going around fighting all these fires. I think our original idea was that, if we do this often enough, things will change systematically, institutions will act differently in the next instance.

But, actually, when there is controversial development, we see perhaps only one in five communities respond and, of those, perhaps only one in five are successful in bringing about change. So, at the end of the day, even when we are winning occasionally, we are effectively losing a lot of space. This makes it more essential than ever to rethink. In the current environment in which there is limited funding, protecting your organization becomes your instinct, you know: “Where do we get more juice, more funding?” We rarely sit back and reflect on the bigger picture, on whether our work is having a meaningful impact in the long-term and, if not, why.

Everyone often focuses only on their individual organizations, but we need to start thinking as an ecosystem of organizations.

Everyone often focuses only on their individual organizations, but we need to start thinking as an ecosystem of organizations. At the end of the day, when the grants stop coming, in the current system it's every organization for themselves, scrambling for resources, even starting businesses to sustain their work. I just don't think that we can function like that. The question is: are we ready to think about new models and structures? One example that might be inspiring is to consider the idea of big cooperatives that have an ecosystem, from political education, to generating income and supporting the work that all of our organizations currently do. I believe that this is the kind of thinking that we need to do.

Thank you for opening this conversation. It already helped me to take a step back which is much needed and especially to think about this as a beginning, rather than something that we have to do to survive.

JH: Thank you, Marko. As you said, we are all so busy firefighting that we rarely get the time or resources to step back and think about larger systems and what some of the alternatives might look like. Not only are those reflective spaces hard to find or to carve out, but there also tend to be few resources available to help invest in those ideas. Even in this short conversation, across four countries, we can already see the threads emerging that connect both the struggles and the innovations. The challenge for all of us is how we can work to strengthen the “connective tissue” that binds us together, to build the trellis that allows these ideas, behaviours, and new norms to weave in and out and to grow together. Right now, we remain isolated drops in very large buckets – and we are losing. We need to shift from firefighting alone to creating the spaces that help us see, align, and move as a collective.

How Courage and Political Clarity Can Sustain Struggles in Contexts of Repression

Martin Macwan’s reflections from India remind us that resistance is sustained not by money, but by the courage and agency of ordinary people. In a context where the State seeks to silence dissent, Martin shares how community-rooted organizing is proving both more resilient and more transformative than donor-driven systems.

JH: Martin describes himself as a “student” which speaks to Martin and who he is – a very humble but incredibly inspirational Dalit leader who’s been involved in many different aspects of organizing against the caste system and particularly within Dalit communities. Martin, would you share a little bit about yourself and how are you coming into this conversation today, because it’s a conversation that has been dear to your heart for many years.

Martin Macwan (MM): Thank you, Jenny, and hello to everyone. Yes, I’ve been doing this now for 45 years, and I can see that I have gone through four stages of life. For about 20% of my time, I was working within an institution where I was groomed. For another 7%, I was establishing my own initiative. This was a very difficult time when there was no money. Then there was a period, which would be about 50% of my life, where we had money and no problems with resources. And, lastly, the period I am in now over the last nine years which would be about 20% of my time, when once again we have no resources.

In these last nine years, the problem has not been that no one wanted to fund us. Basically, [the State of India didn't want us to work, so they prohibited our activities](#). People were sure that we were going to close down in the face of this political pressure. But we asked ourselves: “Why did we set up this organization?” We created it because the community was going through immense hardship, and not because there were resources available that we “needed” to spend. So, whether there are resources or no resources, we have to continue our work.

In these last nine years, despite the legal problems caused by the political situation, we have carried out 40 major programmes. We have raised about 19 million Indian Rupees (about US \$212,000) from the community, that is from poor people. They have given to us. So, with less money and poorer people, we have been able to do maybe three times more work than what we were doing earlier, and much more intensely.

Why? You know, this is the question I find myself asking again and again. As Buddha said, “Forget the world. If you are okay, then the world is going to be okay.” So, we asked ourselves the question: why, 75 years after Indian independence, does the practice of “untouchability” continue to exist in India? Why, when there has been so much “development work” and so much money, is poverty increasing, and the gap between the rich and the poor widening? These are the basic questions that we must confront. And the learning that comes back to me each time is that it is less about the money, and more about the empowered citizen who will make the

difference. Therefore, the role of political education becomes central. If the community is strong, then there are definitely going to be fewer problems, right?

So, we asked ourselves the question: why, 75 years after Indian independence, does the practice of “untouchability” continue to exist in India? Why, when there has been so much “development work” and so much money, is poverty increasing, and the gap between the rich and the poor widening?

Just last month, we organized one of the first programmes in India to protest what is happening in Palestine. Many people in India had tried, but they were not given permission by the government. In fact, someone had even gone to the High Court to get permission and were dismissed with nasty remarks.

We said: “We are going to do it anyway.” We organized the programme and invited the Ambassador of Palestine to our campus. We had about 200 people registered for the programme, but 330 people actually turned up. We raised about half a million rupees (approximately US \$6,000) for Palestine in maybe 20 days. We refused to ask the State for permission for the programme. I said, “Why do I need permission from anyone to light a lamp?” The rights given to us by nature predates the judicial systems. In short, we have to raise these kinds of fundamental questions.

Right now, we are involved in another programme. I don't know how many people outside of India know this, but the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India is a Dalit, and somebody threw a shoe at him mainly because of his caste. Of course, he didn't file a complaint because he was sitting as a judge there. I thought it was the right thing for him to do, to not to file a complaint. It is the duty of the State to file the complaint, not his. But then many people began organizing programmes to abuse the man who threw the shoe, putting up his photograph in public and beating it up with a shoe. I couldn't see any sense in that. So we said: [shoes are very important](#). Dalits were only allowed to wear shoes after 2,000 years of struggle for a life of dignity, we are not going to throw away the shoes now. What we should do is give more shoes to our children. We started to appeal to Dalit teachers and government employees, telling them that whatever they are today is because of the Constitution of India which gave them rights. We asked them to contribute, not as charity, not as pity, but because it is your social obligation. We started with a very small, modest aim, but I think we are going to collect about 5,000 pair of shoes for 5,000 children across many villages.

I'm happy because creativity emerges most when you're in trouble, not when everything is comfortable.

My organization does not have a penny. I personally have not earned a penny in the last year, and many of my colleagues haven't either. But when I go to the villages, poor people say: “No, this is something we must do.” That is why they are giving money. When I faced pressure from

the government, friends from the NGO sector abandoned me, including funding organizations, because they didn't want to be seen as “anti-State.” Many prestigious organizations said: “We wanted to support you.” But they did not. I asked them: “You came to exist because there was problem, so how can you run away when the problem hasn't been addressed?” Otherwise, you lose the reason for your existence. We are not working for money. We are working because there is injustice, because there is indignity.

But I am not worried at all. I'm smiling as I was before. I'm happy because creativity emerges most when you're in trouble, not when everything is comfortable. Only when things crack open do you become more creative. I tell my colleagues: “Only when a sword is hanging on your head do you start thinking proactively.” There is no space for despair. I think there is lot of ground we still need to cover. We must keep our eyes open and look for new allies. Ultimately, at the end of the day, we must ask: “Who will stand by you?” It is the poor people who are going to stand by you.

JH: Thank you, Martin. I want to restate what you just said: we did this work because it was the right thing to do, not because we had the money, and we needed to spend it. That resonates wherever you are in the world. Of course, it's getting increasingly difficult to get external money into India. We are seeing foreign agent laws or laws on “transparency” emerging globally, which are designed to limit the flows of international funding into a country and, at the same time, many of the sources of international funding are drying up. So the moment for radical reimagining is exactly what you have described in your examples, that creativity is what we need right now. Many parts of the system are still in a state of fear and despair, waiting hopefully for the old ways to return. Your words actually turn this on its head: think differently, build the thing we want first, and then think about how to resource it.

Many parts of the system are still in a state of fear and despair, waiting hopefully for the old ways to return. Your words actually turn this on its head: think differently, build the thing we want first, and then think about how to resource it.

When we spoke the other day, you also talked about the role of the State and why social reform must be led and driven by communities. I'd love to hear a bit more on that front – what is the role of the State and what it has become?

MM: We believe, ultimately, that the State is subservient to the people, and not the other way around. I don't get my rights from the State, I get them from the Constitution of India. So, in fact, it is the people who have the supreme right, as they are the ones who make the State. And that is why, for me, the role of political education is very important.

The biggest problem I see right now is a fear of the State. For example, there are many people who come to us and say: “We want to donate money to you, but please make sure that our names don't appear anywhere.” And we are saying: “Sorry, we can't take any money from you, because we need people whose money is fearless.” Our job is to break the fear.

These walls of fear are rising taller and taller, not only in India but around the world. People who have been elected behave as if no law applies to them. We sometimes think that human rights work is very innocent and naïve. This is a misconception. It is essentially the work of political education. But when you are doing that, you are not against the state per se, you are against the practices that are undemocratic or exploitative, whether they come from the judiciary or the State. At times, we have had to fight the judiciary as well. I write openly about it, I speak openly about it, but always with a smile. I never abuse anyone.

JH: Thank you. All three perspectives so far have emphasized the importance of political education, questioning the idea that development can be done in a kind of a political vacuum focused only on the delivery of services. Instead, we need to go back to the fundamentals: what is it to be human? How do we organize in ways where we can build trust, connection, and cohesion?

What we are also seeing in data on attitudes towards governments around the world, is that many people no longer have faith in the system of democracy and what was promised. This is leading to a tilt in public opinion in many contexts towards authoritarianism, a preference for a strong leader, rather than these elites who are perceived as serving only themselves. Both Martin and Marko have pointed out powerfully that we are in a critical moment of crisis.

How a New Economic Imagination May Help Movements Reclaim Agency and Construct More Just and Solidarity-Based Alternatives

At a moment when Indonesia faces the return of authoritarian and nationalist forces, Kamala (Nana) Chandrakirana reflects on what it takes to “begin again” for Indonesia for Humanity, even after 30 years of work. She reminds us that when old systems fail, beginnings become political acts – shaping who holds power, how we organize, the allies we seek, and the futures we imagine.

JH: Kamala (or Nana) is with Indonesia for Humanity, which has just turned 30 this week, so congratulations on that. Tell us, how are you reimagining at this landmark moment in the history of your organization?

Kamala Chandrakirana (KC): We are talking about new imaginings, which really is the call of our time – new imaginings for old struggles – when the world has changed fundamentally. I thought I'd use this opportunity to talk about insights on beginnings, and Martin just beautifully illustrated to us how ruptures create opportunities for new ways forward. And so, I want to focus just on that moment of beginnings.

I'm sharing from my experience in Indonesia, a country that has deep traumas from past violations and conflicts. We are navigating a legacy of 30 years of authoritarianism, and multiple kinds of conflict: inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and secessionist movements against the Indonesian State. We have gone through all the phases of conflict, up to what is now a flawed peace. But we also went through a period of around 15 years of democratic opening, which was a time for new beginnings with a lot of lessons in terms of starting something new. Indonesia for Humanity, now on its 30th birthday, is also beginning something new at a time when we are seeing the reemergence of authoritarianism and nationalist populism. It is in fact a very difficult time.

I want to focus on beginnings, because in the excitement to “do something”, sometimes we simply rush to get things done. But beginnings deserve some thinking through, especially when what you are trying to start anew is something that is genuinely new and unfamiliar, with high stakes and big risks that can generate skepticism, confusion, tension, and also opposition. So, when you are starting something new under these conditions, the beginning matters, and that's the lesson. Beginnings can convey the nature of what you're initiating. Is it a project that you want to implement, or is it an act of resistance? Is it a bold dream that you want people to carry together? Beginnings can convey ownership: whose initiative is this? How big is the umbrella? How open or closed is the space? Beginnings are also opportunities to create a web of support, particularly when your initiative is something that will be contested, not just by other groups that oppose your point of view but also by the State. Beginnings are an opportunity to create your web of support because you know that along the way you will face serious obstacles.

Coming back to Indonesia for Humanity, on our 30th anniversary we want to start again, embark on something new. It's a rather audacious idea, ambitious, and maybe a little foolish. Indonesia for Humanity as an organization is trying to change internally, but it is also embarking on an initiative that engages the movement. We are making a call for the movement, because Indonesia for Humanity itself was created by the movement, as part of the movement, and we see ourselves as part of a bigger community of social change activists. We want to make a call to build mutual reliance as part of securing our sovereignty in the face of a culture of dependence that has been growing for decades. The aid system and international donors were very important for us during the first decades of our political opening and democratization, because that allowed us to start many new things. But over the decades we have become stuck in a culture of dependency. We want to build resilience by bringing people together and enabling the sharing of resources. But it's not just about sharing resources, it's about envisioning and constructing a different economic base for our progressive movements.

We want to make a call to build mutual reliance as part of securing our sovereignty in the face of a culture of dependence that has been growing for decades.

It may seem audacious to think that we as actors with very few resources want to create an alternative economic base that is more just, generative, and solidarity-based. But we envision civil society being active actors in constructing this economy, as well as being good benefactors of it. We aspire to do this by forming new ties through a social contract. It is also a call for cultural transformation within our wider community. So yes, it might be foolish, but we're going to have a go at it.

From my past experience, both inside and outside Indonesia for Humanity, I want to share three insights that could be truly generative:

- 1. Subjectivity matters:** Especially when you are trying to weave across rips and tears in a community and trying to transcend old boundaries and past estrangements, subjectivity matters. Feeling and understanding that this means bringing people together, trying to transcend these rips and tears, is a kind of labour that I'd like to call "affective labour." It is hard work, it is painful, and it is exhausting.
- 2. Language before structure:** Language matters, because before we create a structure for collaboration and implementation, we need to create a language that can be a medium for cognitive connection, for shared references and for collective imagination. We at Indonesia for Humanity spend a lot of time trying to create new phrases and new language, new words to create a new worldview, because our call is for cultural transformation. In that sense, our own cultural transformation is very important, and language is central to that.
- 3. Reframing as reclaiming agency:** This is connected to our crazy idea that we could be part of building an alternative economy that is just, generative, and solidarity-based. A conversation that we have started to open is based on the idea of economy as culture. In

Manuel Castells' edited volume called "Another Economy is Possible", there is a quote that has become a reference for us:

"The economy is not simply related to culture. Economy is culture. Economic practices are human practices that, as such, are determined by humans who embody their ways of being and thinking, their interests, their values, their projects."

When we understand the economy as culture, we feel empowered. It triggers a memory of how local communities have engaged in economic activities within their respective traditions and customs and in their local contexts. The economy is not just to be owned and controlled by economists. We can build confidence to culturally build our own economic practices based on the belief that economy is culture. This is a starting point that begins with a new imagining, while recognizing that we do not know whether we will succeed. That's the nature of such work.

JH: Thank you. I love that you say "either this is ambitious or foolish." I think whatever it is, it cannot just be the same thing that we've done before. We probably need a combination of ambition and foolishness right now. The way that you frame things – so many threads with what others have said – but articulated differently is so powerful. The idea that we need to construct a different economic base. In our othering of "the international development expert", "the economist", "the politician", we have perhaps lost what it is to be human. Recentering what it is to be human in harmony with the planet and in harmony with others, the ways that we feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, and create warm, cohesive, connected societies, is fundamental.

When we understand the economy as culture, we feel empowered. It triggers a memory of how local communities have engaged in economic activities within their respective traditions and customs and in their local contexts.

We've worked with Indonesia for Humanity, and it has been a very active member of our Measuring What Matters learning group. The approach you have developed, Pemaknaan – [which sees measurement as the act of "making meaning"](#) – elevates subjectivity as a critical dimension. The way in which this approach challenges the idea that we can somehow apply scientific logics to understand social change processes has been a real eye-opener. So, your framing of those bold ambitions around how we use language really resonates. In our sector, we often succeed by mirroring the language of the dominant system, and in doing so we lose our own roots.

Going back to questions of economies, how do we create spaces where new imaginations can take root?

KC: My starting point is that we need to construct the economy. Instead of asking which economies, economic theory, or economic model is out there to adopt, we need to design one that suits us. Something that is constructed from our own practices. Even in difficult times, there is still economic activity, including in the form of barter. Nour also mentioned the importance of

being rooted in what we have. This is aligned to the idea that the economy is culture, which could trigger memories that we have forgotten. If we continue to depend on the words of “experts” and only see the economy as they define it, we become shackled to the economy we have now. We have forgotten how local communities work economically. By reaching deep into our collective memory and conjuring relevant contemporary practices, we might be able to construct something from what's there.

At Indonesia for Humanity, we want to transcend old boundaries and past estrangements. As a community, our civil society has fragmented and made boundaries amongst ourselves by saying: “You do economic stuff. We do political stuff. Or, you're doing psycho-social support or social welfare stuff while we are doing advocacy, and you're doing development,” and so on. We have created a mind-set where we have made unhelpful distinctions amongst ourselves. So now we are trying to build bridges with the credit union movement in Indonesia that has been amazing in building an economic base for their members. We want to start making the links between them and community groups that are, for example, advocating for the rights of survivors of mass killings and mass violations. We want to make these connections and bring them together in small spaces.

We are imagining this ecosystem as an economy that is not money-centric. Resources are not just about money: they also include knowledge, networks, and volunteerism.

We believe in small spaces because, when you create spaces that are too big, there is a danger to resort to the comfortable or to focus on things that are already known. Small spaces can better create the conditions for bold thinking and for building a shared imagination. From there, we can begin to link those small spaces with each other, so that they can become a bigger ecosystem. We are imagining this ecosystem as an economy that is not money-centric. Resources are not just about money: they also include knowledge, networks, and volunteerism. At Indonesia for Humanity, these are the four dimensions of resources that can, and should, work together to become something that make up our collective strength, and that can take us down a different pathway.

JH: Thank you, Nana. I feel like we have been now forced into a new moment. We have been talking about reform, localization, the transformation of aid, and decolonization for a long time, but are still quite tethered to the old system, trying to make it just a little bit less bad. What I’m sensing from everything shared so far is that none of the institutions represented here are big institutions that turn up in big conferences and have huge, multi-million dollar budgets and hundreds of staff. These are actors, spaces, and communities operating at the “edges” of the system. The challenge and the invitation for all of us moving forward is: **what can we do differently that actually starts to weave the threads between these bold, brilliant innovations?**

About the Contributing Organizations

Bridging Dialogues

at  Global Dialogue

Bridging Dialogues is a programme housed at Global Dialogue (UK). Its purpose is to support community-based peacebuilding work and to promote its value, so that it is better resourced and more widely recognized for the critical role it plays in fostering and sustaining peace in communities.



Dalia Association is a community foundation that realizes the rights of Palestinians to control their resources for their own durable development for generations to come. Its mission is to mobilize and properly utilize resources necessary to empower a vibrant, independent, and accountable civil society, through community-controlled grantmaking. Its community development approach focuses on the ecological, local economy, social and cultural dimensions.



Global Fund for Community Foundations works to strengthen, harness and demonstrate the value of community philanthropy as an essential element of community-led development and as a strategy for shifting power. Through small grants, technical support, peer exchange and evidence based learning, the GFCF helps to strengthen community philanthropy institutions around the world, so that they can fulfill their potential as vehicles for locally-led development, and as part of the larger global infrastructure for progressive social change.



Indonesia for Humanity is a civil society resource organization, working with the vision of a society empowered in its struggles towards justice, dignity, and well-being for all within the framework of human rights and environmental sustainability. The organization runs programmes across the themes of gender justice, human rights, diversity, tolerance, food sovereignty, and disaster response. Its activities are characterized by building collaborative action with civil society organizations and marginalized communities across Indonesia.



Ministry of Space is an independent activist collective based in Belgrade, Serbia. It was founded in 2011 to promote democratic urban development, spatial justice, and citizen participation in urban planning. It is not a government ministry but an NGO that advocates for public interest over private development, focusing on housing, the green transition, and activating unused spaces.



Navsarjan is a voluntary organization working in India, particularly Gujarat, since 1989 to address the issue of caste based violence and discrimination towards Dalits and the practice of Untouchability in particular. Concretely, it has mobilized masses around acts of violence, non payment of statutory farm wages, land alienation, leadership of women, political education, and primary education – among multiple other thematic issues.

Published May 2026



Global Fund for Community Foundations

The Mount, 2 Woodstock Link

Belfast BT6 8DD

United Kingdom

www.globalfundcf.org

info@globalfundcf.org

A company limited by guarantee. Registered in Northern Ireland No. NI073343

Registered charity number XT18816

Section 21 Company (South Africa):
2010/000806/08

Published by the Global Fund for Community Foundations. All rights reserved