



Understanding the Relationship Between Community Philanthropy and Social Justice Movement Building in Western Uganda

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This paper explores community philanthropy, a practice rooted in locally-owned and controlled resources. It is increasingly recognized for its potential to drive transformative change and shift power dynamics. Unlike traditional top-down development aid, it mobilizes local assets, capacities and knowledge to build trust and collective action.



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Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
CSOs	Civil society organizations
FGDs	Focus group discussions
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GFCE	Global Fund for Community Foundations
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
HRDs	Human rights defenders
IRM	Independent Resource Mechanisms
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
KII	Key informant interviews
LC	Local Council
LEAF	Lakes Edward and Albert Integrated Fisheries and Water Resources Management Project
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PAP	Project Affected Persons
TLC	Twerwaneho Listeners' Club
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

1. Background

Over the years, the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) has been supporting the Twerwaneho Listeners' Club (TLC) to strengthen her capacities to leverage the power within local community structures to advance social justice movements through the utilization of local assets and resources. In 2024, the GFCF supported TLC to implement a project that would facilitate processes that shape shared understanding and collective power, and leverage local resources. Amongst the key activities under the support was conducting this research study, which would culminate in a report to be shared for learning purposes.

For contextual purposes, it is important to note that facilitating processes that shape shared understanding and collective power, and leveraging local resources, are interconnected and fundamental strategies for building effective and sustainable social justice movements. This research offered an opportunity to dive deeper, in order to understand the relationship between local giving and social justice movements.

The study was conducted in communities where TLC had established working relationships sufficient enough to enable the smooth implementation of this research. These are communities where large-scale "conservation" and development projects – financed by external actors with significant resources and power – have led to human rights violations such as evictions, economic displacement and attacks against human rights defenders (HRDs). TLC has supported these communities, helping them to organize in the face of such threats.

2. Objectives of the Study

Overall Objective

To analyze the relationship between community philanthropy and social justice movement building.

Specific Goals

- Determine how community philanthropy strengthens or builds "bonding" and "bridging" social capital within social justice movements.
- Examine how community philanthropy fosters collaboration and solidarity among various social justice causes, such as economic justice initiatives.
- Investigate how community-based funding and resource mobilization strategies enable grassroots social justice initiatives.

3. Methodology

The research study utilized a mixed approach, including both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze data. Primary and secondary sources of data were relied upon to inform the research exercise. Primary data sources were generated through four key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). KIIs were conducted with TLC staff, local community facilitators and organizers, Project Affected Persons (PAPs), project focal persons, members of the community and local leaders at the field level.

Document review was a crucial part of this exercise. It was utilized to gather secondary data from a number of sources, including the following: community requests for support applications; TLC work plans; annual narrative reports; local budgets and community allocations; court applications; African Development Bank's (AfDB) Independent Recourse Mechanism's (IRM) reports; Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) and World Bank correspondence; Green Climate Fund community settlement agreements and the financial reports; Lakes Edward and Albert Integrated Fisheries and Water Resources Management Project (LEAF) II compliance review report¹; LEAF II Management Response²; Leaf II Management Action Plan; IRM of the GCF initial steps report; the Swiss NCP final statement on the complaint against HOLCIM; the LEAF II Eligibility Report; Terms of Reference of the LEAF II project; and, several others. The research team was able to gain understanding regarding: the background information about community struggles; the TLC community intervention / design / strategy and delivery approach; including the specific objectives, key deliverables, timelines, outcomes / impact so far, resources utilized, etc.

The five FGDs were held with the community members from eight landing sites along Lakes Albert and Edward, two community groups impacted by renewable energy projects, as well as communities impacted by conservation projects financed by Multi-Lateral Development Banks. In these discussions, a number of issues regarding the level of involvement of community members in the development and implementation of community work plans, positive and negative outcomes of the interventions, emerging issues and the future areas of focus were reflected upon. Through the FGDs, it was possible to triangulate information gathered from KIIs and the document review. Information related to the aspects of effectiveness and relevance of local giving for social justice struggles was discussed, and generated mostly through the KIIs and FGDs. The engagement with TLC staff and a section of local leaders focused on the sustainability, relevance and the perceived contribution of local giving initiatives towards the lives of the target communities. Regarding respondents to the KIIs and FGDs, a purposive sampling approach was used to identify respondents who were privy to local giving for social justice causes.

A questionnaire was designed, pre-tested and administered, targeting all the randomly selected 516 beneficiaries. Given the number of target beneficiaries (ie. 5,100 direct beneficiaries), the research aimed to obtain responses from a representative sample of 516 beneficiaries following

¹ [IRM Investigation Report on the LEAF II project in Uganda.](#)

² [Management Response to the IRM Compliance Review Report.](#)

the Krejcie and Morgan sampling formulae.³ The survey instrument was designed to generate information that would be critical in measuring the impact of local giving on the success of social justice struggles. The tool also aimed at ascertaining the perceived changes in the lives of the targeted communities, the effectiveness of local giving towards addressing the needs of communities, the impact of local engagement and relevance of the interventions, as well as the appropriateness of local giving towards social transformation.

Limitations of the Study

Local giving for social justice is often informal, relational and deeply embedded in a community's unique culture and history, making it difficult to define, measure and study using traditional research methods.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents of the Survey Population

The survey was able to obtain responses from a total of 516 beneficiaries: 213 males (41.3% of respondents) and 303 females (58.7% of respondents).

The respondents from the questionnaire were divided into different age categories, as follows:

Age Group	Percentage of Respondents
18 – 24	1.3%
25 – 30	6.2%
31 – 39	18%
40 – 45	36.3%
Over 45	36.6%

For FGDs, in total 179 individuals were engaged: 83 males (46.4%) and 96 females (53.6%). As far as the source of livelihood of these individuals is concerned:

Livelihood	Percentage of Respondents
Fishing	34.5%
Farming	32.5%
Businesses	11%
Pastoralists	3.6%
Other	18.4%

³ Krejcie and Morgan, 1970.

4. Relevance

Is Local Giving an Appropriate Strategy for Building Resilient Social Justice Movements?

Western Uganda is one of the country's most naturally endowed resource-rich regions, where conflict for resources and safeguarding the environment is shaping the global conversation on the Just Transition.

For example, conservation projects like LEAF financed by AfDB, the Building Resilient Communities, Wetland Ecosystems and Associated Catchments in Uganda financed by the Green Climate Fund, and the East Africa Crude Oil Project, amongst others, continue being associated with serious human rights violations such as evictions, economic displacement and attacks against HRDs.

The increasing pressure on communities as a result of social and economic injustice has led to the rise of social justice movements agitating for responsible business conduct where state and non-state actors are accountable and required to commit to being transparent in their value chains. With reducing external / donor support, communities are mobilizing and tapping into local assets and resources to keep the momentum going. This study is intended to understand the effectiveness of locally mobilized assets and resources towards building resilient social justice movements and community agency.

The study was carried out in selected communities that have active community projects that have been running for more than two years, and that are exclusively supported through local giving schemes. External projects and initiatives affecting these communities include:

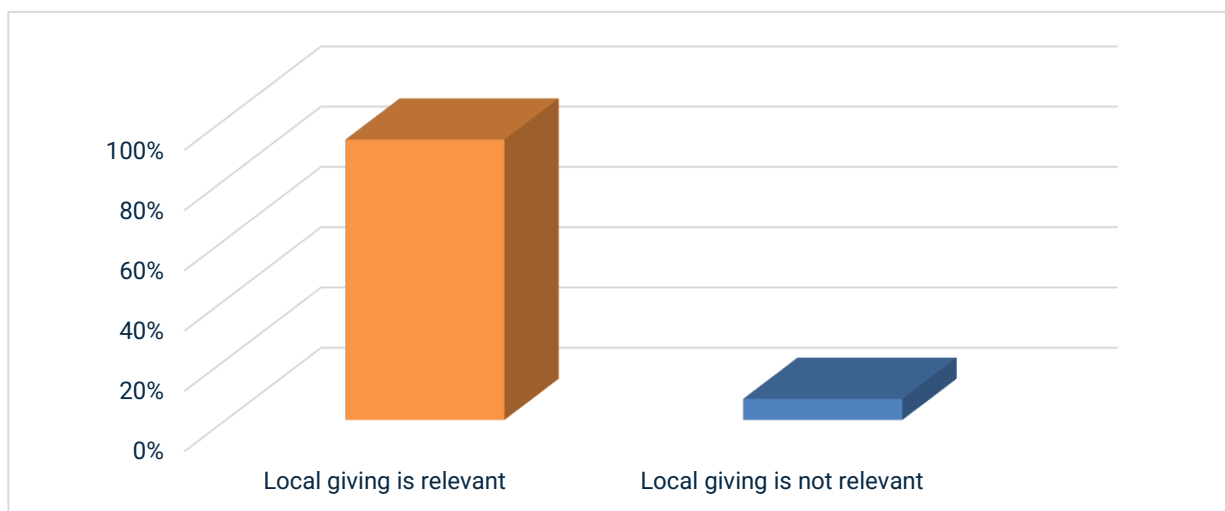
- AfDB financed Leaf II project.
- World Bank financed Uganda Energy for Rural Transformation III (P133312).
- Green Climate Fund financed project FP034, Building Resilient Communities, Wetland Ecosystems and Associated Catchments in Uganda.
- KfW Development Bank – GET FiT financed Hydro Power Project.
- World Bank financed P174337 – Securing Uganda's Natural Resource Base in Protected Areas.

5. Presentation of Findings and Analysis

Relevance of Local Giving to Social Justice Causes

The study measured the perception of communities about the relevance of local giving towards social justice causes. Measuring communities' perceptions of local giving towards social justice actions is crucial because it provides authentic, on-the-ground insights that inform strategy, build trust and ensure that interventions are relevant and effective. Without this data, local giving efforts risk being disconnected from the very people they intend to help, leading to misguided strategies and poor outcomes.

Evidence generated from the research shows that 93% of respondents said that the local giving is relevant. It is only 7% who said it is not relevant, as indicated in the graph below.



Positive perceptions are critical for local giving initiatives that promote social justice because they build trust, increase participation and improve the sustainability and effectiveness of the work. Social justice work can be complex and controversial: creating strong, positive perceptions is even more important in this, as opposed to other types of charitable causes.

Negative perceptions are harmful to local giving initiatives for social justice causes because they erode public trust, discourage donations and hinder community engagement. Social justice issues are often complex and politically sensitive, making them especially vulnerable to negative portrayals that can alienate potential supporters and undermine the movement's credibility. For a local giving scheme to be perceived as relevant, the facilitators need to ensure that the trust of local givers is built, and improve / encourage participation to ensure that the scheme has a broad base of support. This is crucial for driving systematic change. Broad based participation will organically encourage accountable and transparent leadership / conduct of all those involved.

Assessing the Sensitivity of Locally Resourced Social Justice Actions Towards the Local Context and Social Structural Demands

Assessing the sensitivity of locally resourced social justice actions to the local context and social structural demands is critical for their effectiveness, sustainability and ethical integrity. Without this assessment, social justice actions can cause unintended harm, fail to address real needs and exacerbate existing inequalities.

Below are some of the gains when local giving takes social, economic, cultural and political sensitivities into account:

- A sensitive assessment helps to identify the genuine priorities and needs of a community, which may not be obvious to external observers. This prevents the misallocation of resources to perceived needs rather than actual ones.
- Every community has unique assets and strengths, such as social networks, traditional knowledge and local businesses. A proper assessment can identify and leverage these existing resources, rather than introducing entirely new systems that might create dependency or fail after external funding ends.
- When local people are involved in planning and carrying out an assessment, it fosters trust and encourages their participation in implementing the scheme. This leads to greater ownership and support for the initiative.

Such an approach also promotes ethical and responsible giving:

- In sensitive or conflict-prone areas like the Rwenzori region, an ill-conceived programme can inadvertently cause harm, exacerbate tensions or even put frontline HRDs at risk. A context-sensitive assessment helps to identify potential risks and mitigate them.

Cultural Tensions and Considerations

During the FGDs, community members stated that when initiatives took into consideration their cultural norms, social values and respected their political positions, such an approach created a strong sense of trust, ownership and partnership, leading to more successful and sustainable outcomes. Respondents in the FGDs stated that their willingness to engage in planning and decision-making processes was a demonstration that they had no contextual concerns about an initiative's design and implementation.

It is important to note that when communities feel customs are respected, they willingly share their local and traditional knowledge. This offers unique, context-specific insights that can improve a project's relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

During discussions, it was discovered that the alignment of local giving and social justice actions with communities' cultural norms helped reinforce existing social structures and collective identity, bringing community members together around shared values and common goal. This reinforced community bonds and solidarity.

Asset and Resource Use

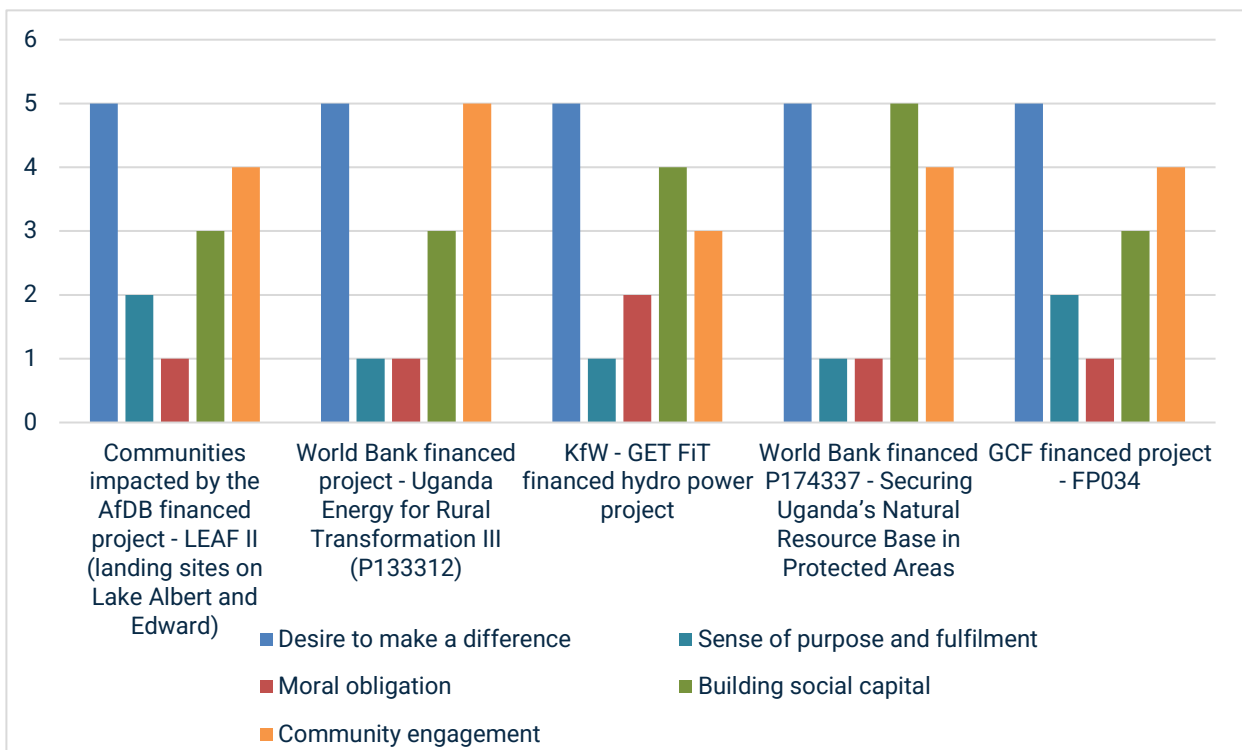
Participants in the FGDs were asked if social justice actions utilized existing traditional knowledge, skills and assets. Participants stated that the use of traditional assets, knowledge and skills increased community buy-in and participation. This approach enhanced the relevance of social justice actions because they aligned with local practices and values. This made it possible for the actions to address the actual needs and priorities of the communities.

When social justice actions respect cultural and social aspects, the outcomes are more effective, sustainable and equitable for all involved. This approach moves beyond simply imposing solutions, instead fostering genuine inclusion and community empowerment by valuing diverse perspectives and practices

How Inclusive Were Locally-Resourced Social Justice Actions? Assessing Communities' Experience of Participating in Locally-Resourced Social Justice Actions

Assessing communities' experiences was considered important because it is critical for ensuring an initiative's relevance, effectiveness and long-term success. This process provided valuable feedback from the communities most affected, helping to ensure that the initiative actually met their needs / expectations and was not simply an externally imposed solution.

Below is a presentation of more findings. This graph assesses what factors motivate respondents to increase their personal contribution to local community projects and initiatives. Each of the five motivations, listed at the bottom of the chart, was ranked on a scale from 0 – 5 by respondents.



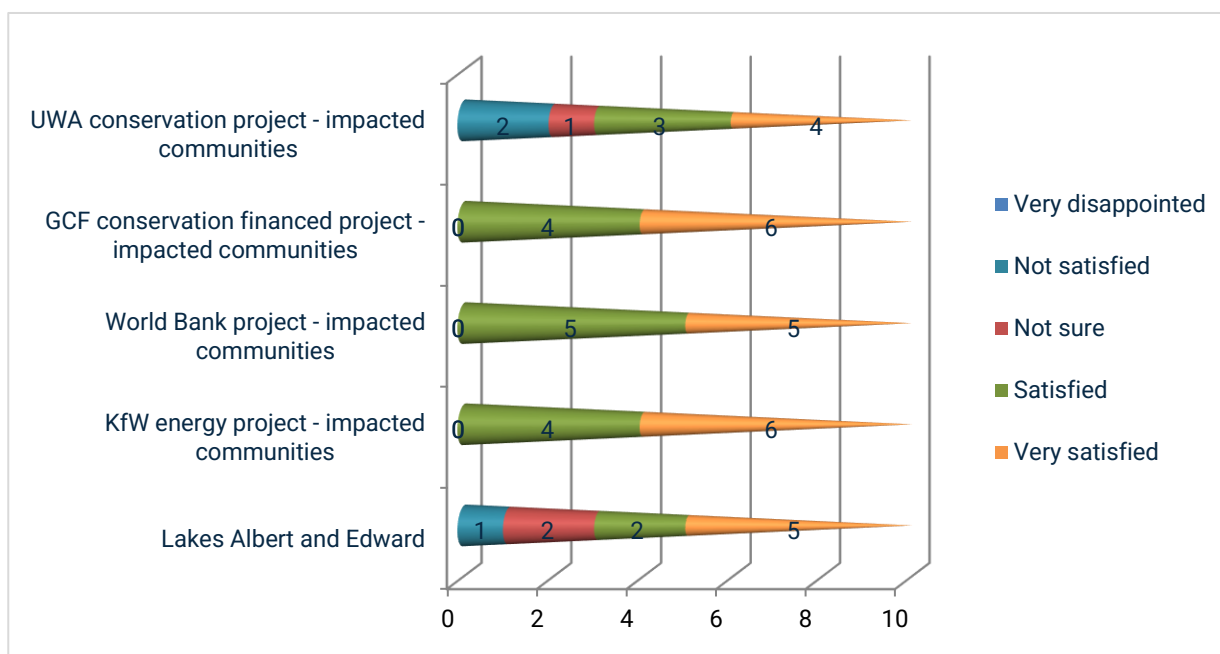
According to the findings illustrated in the graph, 100% of respondents stated that they were motivated to increase personal contributions to local projects and initiatives because of the desire to make a difference in their communities. The second highest rankings as a source of motivation were related to community engagement (80%), followed by building social capital (52%). 22% of respondents stated that they were motivated by having a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their communities. Only 12% felt that it was a moral obligation to increase their personal contributions to local community projects and initiatives.

The findings show that respondents were driven by the desire to make a difference in their communities. In this case, the drive behind local giving was to address social injustices that had a negative impact on communities' livelihoods, human rights and the environment.

The findings also show a sense of collective responsibility as a major driving factor in local giving. This was reinforced by the fact that all the local contributions made addressed social injustices associated to investments that negatively impacted a large number of community members. More than 80% of the respondents stated that community engagement was a major driving factor.

There is strong feedback pointing to why communities are motivated to contribute towards local causes. Local giving / philanthropy empowers communities to make a tangible difference by leveraging their unique knowledge, resources and relationships. Unlike top-down aid, this grassroots approach has fostered self-sufficiency and ensured that solutions are culturally relevant and aligned with community priorities. The process not only solved immediate problems but also built long-term resilience and civic engagement.

How Would You Rate Your Overall Experience in Contributing to Social Justice Causes?

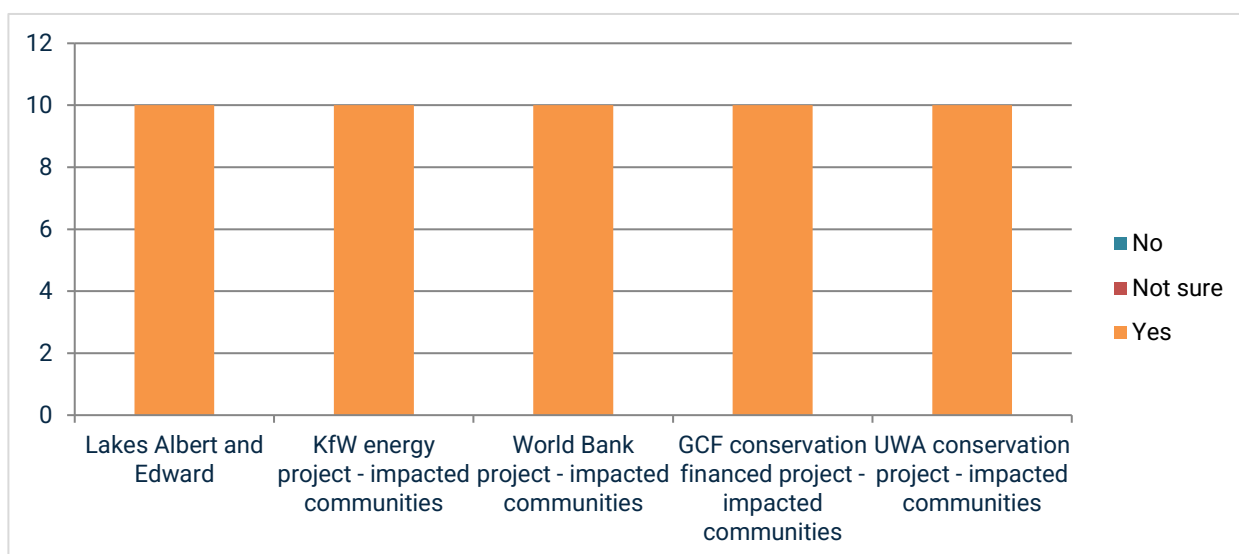


According to this graph, research findings show two distinct responses. 88% of the respondents stated that they were satisfied by their overall experience of contributing to social justice causes, while 6% were not satisfied. Another 6% stated that they were not sure. Findings show contrasts in experiences and levels of satisfaction. Interview questions were followed up by five specific FGDs. During these, community members impacted by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) conservation project, and those on Lakes Albert and Edward, stated that they were not satisfied because they had only partially achieved positive outcomes from their social struggles, while some community groups had achieved positive results within a short period of time. To shed more light on this, community members from the three communities stated that they had secured important decisions from the High Court of Uganda and the Independent Recourse Mechanism of the African Development Bank. However, while both decisions were ruled in their favour, the Government of Uganda is not yet to commit compensating them.

During the same process (FGDs), communities impacted by renewable energy projects financed by KfW and the World Bank, as well as the GCF conservation project, stated that they were satisfied with the final outcome because the process resolved their concerns. The World Bank and KfW are currently monitoring a compensation exercise implemented by the Ministry of Energy. Communities impacted by the GCF projected signed a dispute resolution agreement whereby the Ministry of Water and Environment committed to providing incentive packages for people impacted by the project.

Key lessons out of this process: Communities' overall experience contributing to social justice causes is important. There might be many factors, but according to this study, the final outcome / end result is significant. Put simply, communities tend to set targets for what they want to see emerging out of their struggles. In this case, all communities registered a level of success. Findings also show that the level of success had an impact on the level of satisfaction. Levels of satisfaction most times determine the likelihood of a particular behaviour being repeated. People repeat behaviour that brings them satisfaction and pleasure, and stop those that bring them dissatisfaction and pain.

Do You Feel that Your Voice is Heard and that Your Contributions are Valued by the Organizers and Other Members of the Community?



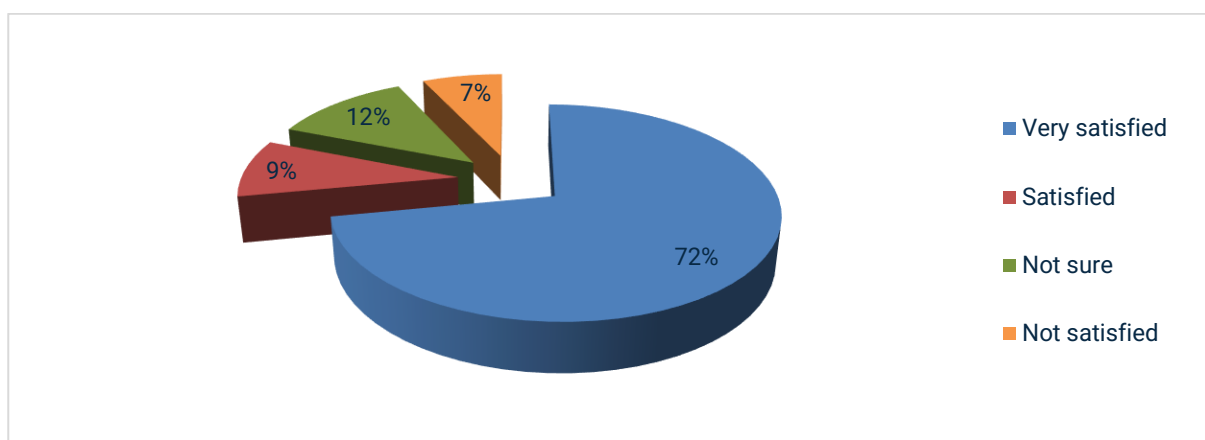
According to the findings in this graph, all respondents stated that they felt their voices were heard and their contributions valued by the organizers and other members of the community during community actions. This was because organizers promoted participation by providing a platform for individuals and communities to express their needs, ideas and concerns, leading to greater engagement, better decision-making and improved outcomes. Communities stated that they felt heard and their perspectives were valued. They also stated that they were motivated to participate in shaping their communities and the local environment. The findings confirm that making participants feel recognized and valued empowers individuals, builds trust and fosters a positive culture.

Secondly, voice and participation was found crucial in terms of accountability because it enabled communities to express their needs and concerns, thereby influencing decisions and ensuring their contributions were efficiently and effectively deployed to the actions and struggles that they were behind. Community meetings / engagements created room for greater responsiveness and transparency from TLC, leading to improved governance and empowerment for community members.

Voice and participation significantly increased community buy-in for initiatives by fostering ownership, building trust and ensuring that the initiative aligned with local needs. When community members are involved from the initial stages of a project, they feel invested in its success and are more likely to support it and sustain it in the long-term. By including communities in decision-making processes, an initiative shifts from being an externally imposed endeavor to a shared community effort. This shared ownership dramatically increases the likelihood of long-term sustainability and success.

Assessing Perceived Impact

Assessing perceived impact was important because it helped capture the subjective experiences and interpretations of communities, which differ significantly from objective, data-driven metrics. By understanding how communities perceived an initiative's consequences, TLC is able to enhance decision-making, improve transparency, build credibility and increase the effectiveness of initiatives in affected communities moving forward. The following graph shows a breakdown of responses to the following question: how satisfied are you with the impact of local giving towards social justice actions?



Assessing community satisfaction was critical to evaluating the impact and effectiveness of community philanthropy and social justice initiatives. Without this feedback, there was a risk that if the initiative was misaligned with the community's actual needs, this could lead to distrust, inefficiency and missed opportunities for sustainable change. 81% of the respondents stated that they were satisfied, 12% stated that they were not sure while 7% stated that they were not satisfied.

Satisfaction is vital for communities because satisfied individuals create strong, loyal relationships that foster repeated behaviour and positive word-of-mouth, attracting new givers and leading to increased local assets. A community-centric culture within community philanthropy also identifies areas for improvement, builds a strong brand reputation, and helps organizers / managers understand community needs, ultimately contributing to the overall functionality of the giving ecosystem.

7% of unsatisfied givers and 12% of givers who are not sure is a significant number and requires further attention. During FGDs, community members stated that some expectations were not met. For example, community members stated that they had contributed significant amounts towards legal fees, submitting complaints though were not yet able to receive compensation. Managing expectations has turned out to be a key driver in building stronger systems that foster local giving for social justice causes.

In communities, expectations and satisfaction are vital factors that profoundly influence stability and growth. According to expectancy-disconfirmation theory, satisfaction arises from the alignment between a community's performance and its residents' expectations. When expectations are met or exceeded, residents feel content and engaged, while unmet expectations can lead to dissatisfaction, distrust, and conflict. While 81% seems to be a good number, there are no assurances that these figures can continue improving, because their satisfaction has been influenced by the end result.

Social justice causes and movements are a challenge to power and authority because they contest existing power structures and seek to redistribute resources, rights and opportunities more equitably. These movements aim to dismantle systems of inequality that benefit those in power at the expense of marginalized groups. The Evicted Communities vs Uganda Wildlife Authority case and the Fisherfolks on Lakes Albert and Edward vs the AfDB financed LEAF II project demonstrate how power and systems can perpetuate injustices. While the Courts of Uganda and the Independent Accountability Mechanism of the AfDB ruled in favour of local communities, the government is yet to commit to compensating them.

It is always a challenge dismantling systems of oppression because these systems are perpetuated by deeply entrenched institutional barriers, such as discriminatory laws and policies, and face significant system resistance from those invested in maintaining the status quo. Overcoming these forces requires **sustained collective effort, a willingness to engage in uncomfortable self-reflection on one's role within these systems, and a commitment to changing both institutions and individuals to foster equitable opportunities and fundamental respect for human dignity.**

Managing expectations is crucial when encouraging local giving in communities for several strategic reasons. These include preventing burnout, maintaining momentum, building trust and adapting to the long and complex processes of social change. Unrealistic expectations can lead to intense disappointment and frustration, which can demobilize activists and cause internal conflict.

Continued support, including sensitization and capacity building in target communities, is important. The findings above call upon all stakeholders, including communities, to **redefine "success" beyond a single victory**. Social movements like the ones references in this report should avoid over-simplified, black-and-white metrics of success and failure. Instead, they should acknowledge that meaningful social change is often a long and multi-generational effort with both advances and setbacks.

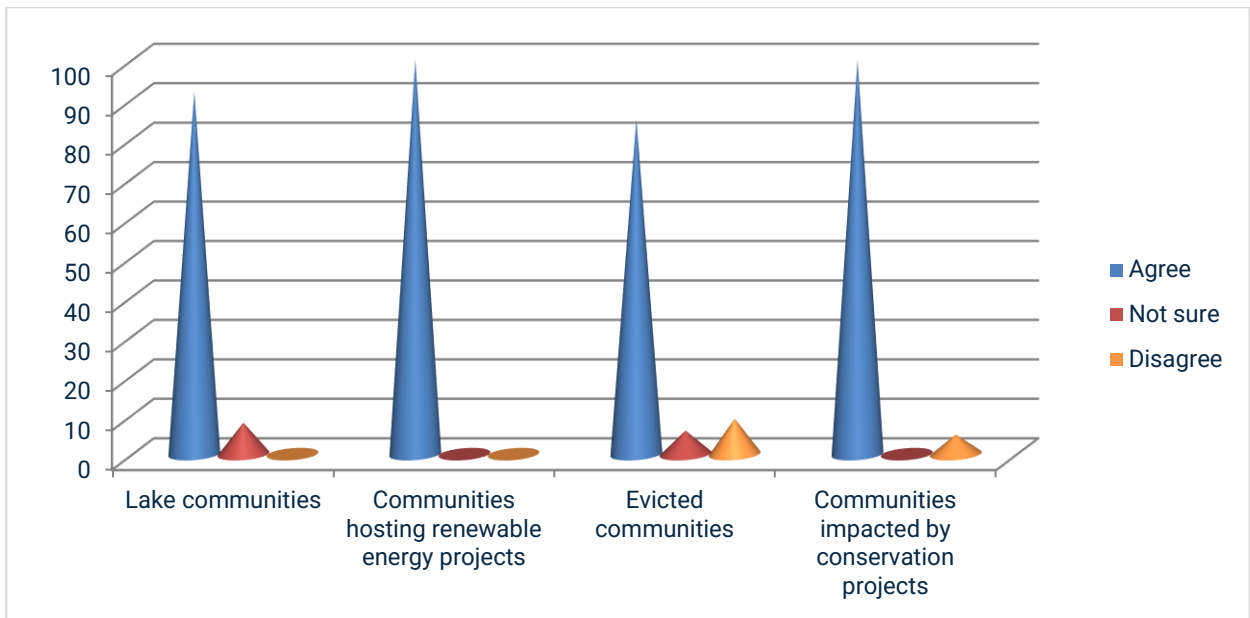
Assessing Communities' Ownership of Social Justice Actions Supported through Local Giving Initiatives

Ownership and empowerment are vital for community projects because they ensure long-term sustainability, address true community needs, build local capacity and increase project effectiveness. Without community investment and control, projects are often perceived as external impositions and fail once outside resources or management are withdrawn. When community members take ownership, they are invested in the project's long-term success, longevity and maintenance. This deepens their commitment beyond the initial launch and prevents projects from failing once external support ends. Secondly, community ownership fosters a culture of shared responsibility and trust. When local stakeholders are involved in decision-making, they hold each other accountable for the outcomes and transparently manage resources.

Empowerment equips community members with the skills, knowledge and confidence to take control of their own development. Social justice movements' success depends on their ability to remain resilient. Empowerment builds resilience, enabling communities to adapt to challenges and continue progressing, without depending on external support. In addition to building resilient communities, this also enables communities to challenge existing power relations by giving a voice to historically under-represented groups. This promotes social inclusion and addresses systemic inequalities, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes. The following section of this report was intended to determine if participants feel a sense of ownership over the process and outcomes.

Do You Feel any Sense of Ownership over Locally-Resourced Social Justice Actions and their Outcomes?

To build a sense of ownership over an initiative and its outcomes, a focus on empowerment, transparency, and developing a clear connection to a larger purpose is crucial. When people feel personally invested, they are more engaged, motivated and accountable for the results, driving the initiative's success. To understand communities' connection with different initiatives, we interrogated communities' sense of ownership.



According to the findings this graph, 89.25% of the respondents stated that they felt a strong sense of ownership over the initiative and outcome.

A sense of ownership over a project suggests communities have genuine influence and control over its decisions, implementation and outcomes. To influence decisions, communities must have been involved as active participants, contributed resources, and felt a deep connection to the project, leading to increased trust and collaboration, enhanced sustainability, improved quality of life, and a stronger sense of collective pride and purpose.

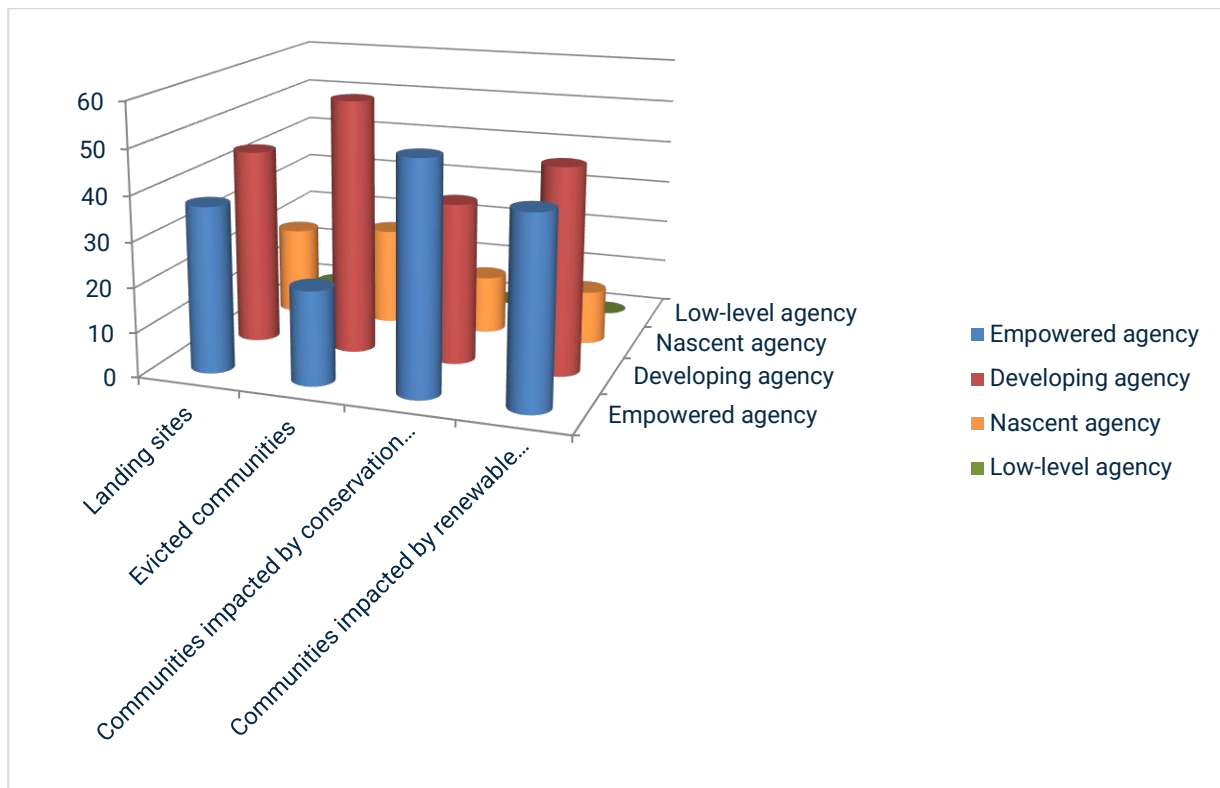
A community's sense of ownership over a project leads to greater community engagement, leading to successful project sustainability and maintenance, improved local capacity building, stronger community trust and pride, as well as the fulfillment of genuine local needs. Ownership structures profoundly influence the long-term sustainability and social justice outcomes of social movements by shaping power dynamics, resource allocation and internal accountability.

Connection and local philanthropy strengthen accountability by shifting power dynamics and prioritizing the needs and knowledge of those most affected by the work. Rather than top-down oversight from distant donors, this approach fosters "downward accountability", whereby organizations are responsible to their beneficiaries and the local community.

Have Your Interactions with Locally-Resourced Social Justice Actions Increased Your Overall Sense of Agency to Create Change in Your Community?

This study was premised on the assumption that community philanthropy can contribute towards community agency. An overall sense of agency creates change in a community because it promotes a sense of shared belief among citizens that they have the collective capability to organize and take action to produce desired outcomes. A broader concept, known as collective efficacy, is crucial for community development and is amplified by strong social connections and supportive civic structures. Community philanthropy can promote collective efficacy by fostering a shared belief in a community's power to create change, building strong social relationships and enabling successful collaborative projects. When community members

can collectively identify and address injustices, the resulting solutions are more effective, legitimate and tailored to local needs.



According to this graph, more than 90% of respondents stated that they felt local giving increased their overall sense of agency to create change in their communities.

Community agency is difficult to achieve in local communities due to systemic barriers, power imbalances and local-level challenges that limit effective engagement. The gap between idealized community empowerment and the reality of local dynamics often leads to cynicism and disengagement, rather than collective action. Some of the communities involved in this research were facing economic displacement, evictions as well as threats to the environment, amongst other existential threats. While speaking to these communities about factors that brought them together and led to a strong sense of agency, two factors stood out. These were:

1. **Collective community challenges:** Collective community challenges foster community agencies as they can lead to the creation of a shared vision, the mobilization of local resources and the development of new leadership. When a community confronts a significant problem together, it builds a sense of collective identity and increases social capital, which helps members take collective action for positive change
2. **Community philanthropy:** This promotes community agency by empowering local people to identify their own needs, pool their own resources, and direct their own development, leading to locally-driven solutions and increased community capacity, voice and trust. Community philanthropy shifts power from outside institutions to the community itself, fostering a sense of ownership over initiatives and enabling sustainable, context-specific progress.

These findings indicate that collective challenges and community philanthropy can build strong connections. Connection, as evidenced by strong social ties, fuels civic engagement by fostering trust and a willingness to collaborate around common issues, which then strengthens supportive civic structures. These structures, in turn, often provide the shared spaces and resources necessary for communities to build stronger connections, creating a positive feedback loop where both social bonds and community institutions are mutually reinforced and improved.

Therefore, the study findings point to the relevance of local giving and how this can thrive in societies facing collective challenges. Connection strengthens community agency by building social capital, increasing collective efficacy, fostering trust and enhancing a community's collective voice. When communities are connected, they can more effectively organize, mobilize resources and work together to solve local problems and influence decisions that affect their lives.

6. Best Practices

Key best practices for locally-resourced social justice actions include prioritizing community ownership, basing actions on local assets and needs, and building long-term, sustainable capacity. Effective initiatives are people-centered and focused on systemic change, rather than on temporary, "top-down" fixes.

Engaging and Empowering Local Communities

- **TLC's approach put community members in the driver's seat.** True social justice comes from within the community, with local leaders and residents in the driver's seat – rather than simply being recipients. Community members were the primary agents of their own change.
- **TLC positioned rights holders at the centre of the struggle.** TLC's approach enabled rights holders / communities to make decisions in an inclusive manner. Inclusive decision-making processes give rights holders a powerful voice to shape their destiny and build trust.
- **TLC's approach built trust and relationships in communities.** TLC invested time in building trust and respectful relationships by supporting communities to identify shared interests, resources and strategies while placing social and cultural sensitivities at the heart of social justice actions. Building trust and relationships involves empathetic, non-judgmental listening and an understanding of a community's unique history, culture and social dynamics.
- **All the surveyed social justice actions were characterized by community participation through inclusive practices.** These actions created an environment where everyone felt comfortable participating. This included creating flexible leadership structures, using accessible communication methods and creating safe spaces for dialogue that accounted for diverse backgrounds.

Understanding and Leveraging Local Resources

- **TLC's approach to interventions focused on communities' strengths rather than weaknesses.** Instead of focusing on problems and deficits, this approach identified and mobilized existing assets, skills, knowledge and leadership already present in communities. It built on what works and exists, which makes it more empowering.
- **Utilization of indigenous knowledge.** Recognition and valuing local, indigenous knowledge and practices helped identify solutions that are rooted in a community's own wisdom. Interventions rooted in communities' own wisdom are more likely to be accepted, effective and sustainable.
- **Building locally-resourced social justice actions that are sustainable.** Social justice requires long-term funding, not just short-term project grants.

Commitment to Long-Term, Systemic Change

- **TLC's approach focused on the root causes and not symptoms.** Examining and addressing underlying systemic issues that cause injustice, not just the symptoms, involves understanding the power structures, policies and historical context that perpetuate inequality. One of the standout examples is the AfDB LEAF II project, where communities were able to point out contextual issues that perpetuated inequality. The AfDB management action plan seeks to address – amongst other issues – the root causes that perpetuate inequality and injustices on landing sites around Lakes Albert and Edward.
- **Building communities' capacities for self-reliance.** Equipping communities with the skills and resources to continue the work on their own, without depending on external support, promotes self-reliance and sustainability. This also builds resilient social justice movements.
- **Successfully piloting the implementation of ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation to track progress and gathered feedback from community members.** This ensures that the initiative remains accountable to the people it serves, and can adapt to changing needs.

Fostering Partnerships and Collaboration

- **TLC's interventions have fostered partnerships and collaboration.** This is between local communities with state and non-state enterprises, national and international NGOs, local governments, Ministry Departments (Ministry of Water and Environment, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, Ministry of Finance, etc.), Development Banks (World Bank, AfDB, KfW, Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, etc.), independent non-judicial accountability mechanisms (the Inspection Panel, Independent Recourse Mechanism, Independent Redress Mechanism, etc.) and national contact points at the OECD, amongst many others. This allows for the sharing of expertise and resources, as well as the potential for ongoing influence and dialogue.

7. Conclusion

Community philanthropy is crucial for building resilient and sustainable social justice movements because it shifts power, promotes self-determination and fosters deep-rooted solidarity. Unlike traditional top-down funding models that can create dependency, community-led approaches tap into local assets and knowledge to create lasting, systemic change.

Community philanthropy helps social justice movements become resilient in the face of challenges like shifting donor priorities, economic instability or government hostility. By relying on a diverse base of local donors – from small individual contributions to local businesses – movements become less vulnerable to the agendas and constraints of large, distant funders. Local structures and networks are often the first to respond during times of crisis. Community philanthropy allows for the quick mobilization of resources and people, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters. Funding decisions are made by the people most impacted by injustice, rather than by outsiders. This builds local agency and ensures that resources are directed towards solutions that are culturally relevant and truly needed.

This model moves beyond just money, building social capital and fostering self-sufficiency to ensure long-term viability. Community philanthropy recognizes that assets go beyond money to include local knowledge, networks, social relationships, trust and volunteer time. Tapping into these resources is crucial for the longevity of any movement. It fosters a local culture of giving and mutual aid, where people feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for community well-being. This creates a stable, grassroots-based funding stream that is not dependent on external sources. Community-led initiatives are designed for the long haul. Instead of focusing on short-term fixes for immediate problems, this approach invests in building the capacity, infrastructure and relationships necessary for sustained, systemic transformation.

At its core, community philanthropy is a mechanism for redistributing power, which is central to achieving social justice. It consciously shifts power away from elite institutions and towards local grassroots groups, reversing the top-down dynamics of conventional aid and philanthropy. By putting decision-making authority in the hands of those most affected by injustice, it ensures that marginalized communities have a voice and can advocate for their own rights. It empowers movements to tackle the root causes of injustice, not just the symptoms. For example, funding can go toward challenging oppressive systems and advocating for policy reform, rather than solely providing immediate relief.

The GFCF 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.



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About the Author

Gerald Kankya has worked in the areas of human rights, democratic governance and access to justice in Uganda for nearly a decade as Team Leader at the Twerwaneho Listners' Club, a grassroots human rights organization. In the role, he has supported local communities' journeys to access remedy through monitoring and documentation of human rights harms linked to business interests, while also supporting communities to access independent accountability mechanisms such as National Contact Points and bank's grievance redress mechanisms. Gerald graduated with a Master's Degree of Arts in Ethics and Public Management and a Bachelor's Degree in Social Sciences from Makerere University. He is passionate about human rights and believes in empowering communities to bring about change in and around their communities.

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