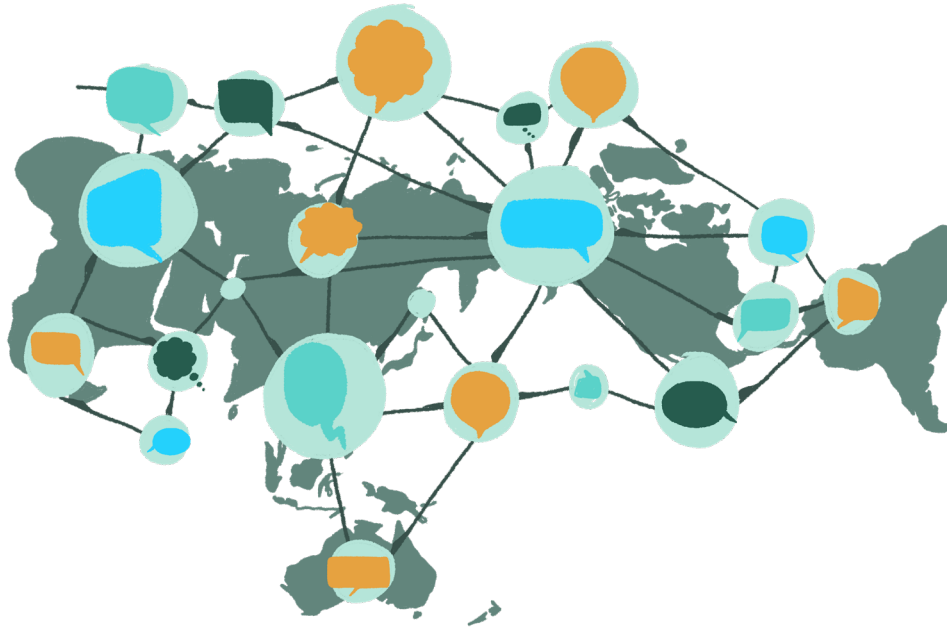


# Reimagining Resourcing and Solidarity in Times of Change:

## Key Takeaways from Community Gathering



### April 2025

In a recent virtual gathering titled Reimagining Resourcing and Solidarity in Times of Change, Patrick Steiner-Hirth shared a profound insight: “[A]ll of us here in this room have been wanting to dismantle the aid and peacebuilding system for a very, very long time. The issue is we did not want it to happen like this, and certainly not at the cost of those who are suffering now.” This reflection set the stage for a critical discussion on the shifting funding landscape facing civil society organisations (CSOs) today.

The event brought together over 40 activists, organisers, and thought leaders from around the globe to explore how civil society can evolve beyond crisis-response into building resilient ecosystems founded on mutual support, sustainable resourcing, and collective strength. With challenges mounting—ranging from cuts in international aid, particularly the US funding stop, to growing political polarisation and violent conflicts—the gathering sought to answer a pressing question: How can we transform this moment of disruption into fertile ground for change?

The gathering was guided by three speakers: Befekadu Hailu, a writer, activist, and co-founder of the Centre for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) in Ethiopia; Happy Olal, a community organiser and social justice activist from Kenya; and Patrick Steiner-Hirth, a Senior Programme Manager at the Peace Team of the Robert Bosch Stiftung. They each shared their diverse perspectives on the future of funding and solidarity, several themes stood out:

#### **New Ways of Collaborating**

The gathering underscored that civil society is currently experiencing significant disruption. The prioritisation of security needs over peacebuilding and humanitarian priorities is becoming increasingly evident. Abrupt funding cuts to essential organisations have had a devastating impact on their ability to serve communities. In light of this chaos, it’s imperative to abandon the nostalgia for “how things were” and instead embrace the new normal. As we navigate this landscape, we must commit to shifting power dynamics, becoming true allies, and advocating for

those without access. Exploring innovative ways of collaboration and resource-sharing—whether material, intellectual, or communal—is essential to continue our vital work and strengthen our connections across regions.

### **Solidarity in Action**

A key theme that emerged was the importance of standing in solidarity. Collective action must transcend traditional support systems. For CSOs, this means not only supporting one another but also engaging local communities for mutual assistance. Funders, on the other hand, need to rethink their approaches, fostering equitable, trans-local systems of support that avoid creating dependency. Philanthropy can leverage its unique position—unencumbered by political funding cycles—to invest in informal groups, early-stage initiatives, and marginalised actors.

### **Independence Funding**

Another key take-away from Befekadu Hailu was the concept of independence funding. A reliance on external financial resources can lead to crippling dependencies that limit CSOs' choices and adaptability. Future funding strategies should prioritise organisational sustainability alongside core missions. Independence funding is not merely unrestricted grants, but rather targeted support designed to help local CSOs achieve autonomy while executing essential projects. The relationship between international and local organisations should be built on partnership, with local entities actively crafting sustainability plans to reduce dependence on external funding.

### **Enhancing Political and Civic Education**

A resilient civil society also means strengthening political and civic education in empowering communities to recognise their collective power and shape their own futures. This is not just about providing resources, but about equipping people with the tools to advocate for their rights and hold institutions accountable. We must cultivate organisations and structures deeply rooted in community power. That means shifting away from top-down models and creating the space for empowered citizens to drive change. This requires

prioritising community-led initiatives, fostering political education to unlock global potential and support, and ensuring citizen involvement at every level, including at decisions that are made at the global level. There is a wealth of experience among civil society. We must mobilise this learning and diverse experiences into trans-local engagement, building solidarity and shared visions across borders to address global challenges collectively.

### **Harnessing Collective Strength and Wisdom**

Frontline activists remind us of the tremendous collective strength and wisdom within civil society. Their long-standing commitment to human rights, social justice, and community empowerment—often at significant personal risk—cannot be easily undone by funding cuts or political shifts—an insight and experience shared by Happy Olal from his work with the Social Justice Centre Movement. Across the globe, from Pakistan to Kenya, communities are rising with clarity and conviction, challenging systemic injustices and demanding accountability. Their resilience demonstrates that true change is rooted in solidarity, education, and lived experiences, not mere financial handouts.

### **Building a Resilient Future**

As we navigate a landscape where funding is disappearing and global standards are under threat, we must recognise and support the individuals—not just the programmes—who uphold justice. Their collective wisdom, forged through struggle, is a vital foundation that needs protection and cultivation. History shows that transformative change emerges from self-organised civil society, drawing resources from diverse and unexpected sources. Today, as we face interconnected crises—from climate change to human rights violations to economic exploitation—we must learn from this legacy. Moving forward, we must shift from concern to concrete action, prioritising grassroots movements, reimagining philanthropic practices to focus on community needs, and fostering translocal collaboration to build a more equitable and resilient future driven by autonomous civil actors and their collective action.