

# Re sourcing cing

How to sustain social  
movements through  
community provision

your  
community

A toolkit by  
Zahra Dalilah



**Africans in  
the Diaspora**

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# Introduction

African, Afrodescendent and Black communities are filled with outstanding social and environmental movement leaders and activists who have the vision, political analysis and skill sets to implement, at scale, the change that our planet needs.

Sadly, too often one of the most draining and counterproductive realities of these communities and movements is a struggle to access resources to support the development of their work.

Philanthropic institutions or funders can plug some of the resource gap by making grants to movements. But not enough funders fund movements, fund Black-led movements, or fund Black-led movements in the Global South. The vast majority of philanthropic dollars generated in the Global North, stay in the Global North, and not much of it ends up in the hands of Afrodescendent and Black communities.

*“By connecting Black women donors to grassroots Black feminist organizations, we have shifted the narrative of how Black women: create, sustain, and fund their own movements.*

*We stand as a model for the philanthropic sector; we are the solidarity funding that Black women deserve.”*

***Black Feminist Fund***

For example, last year, the Black Feminist Fund released research evidencing that only 0.1% of the world’s philanthropic money goes to Black feminist activists. What’s more, institutional philanthropy<sup>1</sup> and the funding mechanisms

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s note: Philanthropy describes the act of giving. Institutional philanthropy refers to the network of philanthropic institutions which have created the norms, culture and praxis around disbursement of wealth that can be identified in the grant-making sector.

it uses can often corrupt and hinder the work rather than simply providing the necessary resources and moving on. This often happens when institutional philanthropy falls down three common holes.

## **1. Institutional philanthropy based on trends**

Philanthropy tends to work on different trends that come and go. Unfortunately, poverty doesn't come and go and neither does capitalism. Philanthropy often falls short as its focus on innovation takes it away from the crucial long, slow building needed for much movement work.

Fickle foundations will often shift their focus areas or interests with little transition time, pulling funds and infrastructure that has become a staple for the movements they were supporting, to divert them elsewhere. It's rare (but it does exist!) that foundations give stably and consistently to movements regardless of shifting trends. This should be the norm rather than the exception.

## **2. Philanthropic institutions as risk averse**

Philanthropic institutions are usually governed by a series of complex rules and set laws that are put in place to protect money and privilege. As a result, institutions are incredibly risk averse. The context within which movements operate is unpredictable and fast-changing so they have to take risks.

Oftentimes, these risks have put their lives and communities in danger, while institutions stay in their comfort zones nestled in the protection of wealth, failing to support the work with the greatest capacity to impact change.

*“Often it is the boldest, most daring movements with the capacity to make the most radical, impactful and healing change are those which are perceived as the highest risk to fund.*

*Perhaps, they are not operating within your borders or not registered in a format that you can fund. Furthermore, if iced out by their governments, they may struggle to access financial institutions or to get insurance on their assets.*

*For security reasons they might not always be able to share many details about their plans, they could be working in remote areas that are not always appropriate for regular visits, or in countries that are isolated on the global stage, bringing in a host of complications when it comes to financial transfers.”*

**Zahra Dalilah**

### 3. Philanthropic institutions wield power to set and influence political agendas

The process of setting up a fund often requires developing criteria which dictate who the fund is appropriate for. These parameters often become a mechanism through which philanthropic institutions set the agenda of what folks on the ground will work on.

When power and control is concentrated in the hands of money, ideas and visions are conceded to fit philanthropic demands.

The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation is a great example of this. Their pouring of money into a fight against malaria has centred “patented<sup>1</sup> products, such as new insecticides and drugs to counter resistance; vaccines; and genetically modified (GM) and gene drive mosquitoes.”

As a result, those who are decrying the use of genetic modification and privatised, patented healthcare as a solution have become marginalised in the conversation.

The desire to live free of the harms of malaria pushes civil society to compromise and conform to the path laid out by the Gates' foundation rather than holistic solutions which get to the root causes and address health inequality,

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<sup>1</sup> A patent gives the inventor [in this case of a drug] the right to stop others, for a limited period, from making, using or selling the invention without their permission. Patented products are therefore not widely available for general and public use, unless expressly made so.

corporate pharmaceutical ethics and maintaining balanced ecosystems.

## **The Paradox of Philanthropic Institutions and the Logic of Capital**

One inevitable paradox of philanthropic institutions is that they start with people whose material needs have been met in excess and abundance, and then aim to reach people whose material needs have not been sufficiently met or have not been met at all.

Institutional philanthropy is by design reaching outside of its own world and each time must start to build trust, knowledge and understanding of the communities it wants to support.

Furthermore, it exists in a broader extractive<sup>1</sup>, transactional, capitalist<sup>2</sup> framework where capital is always the priority, and it is spent only when there is a clear return on investment. So money is tightly guarded, often with bureaucratic or physical violence, and is only parted with reluctantly, if there is an immediate and guaranteed benefit to doing so. In the

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1 Author's note: Extractive here means rooted in a colonialist mindset of taking, from people and land, when you are in a position of relative power.

2 Author's note: Capitalist is an adjective describing the way in which a system, person or practice is aligned with the values of capitalism including the prioritisation of wealth creation above the wellbeing of people and ecosystems.



context of philanthropy, monitoring and evaluation is the process through which the return is assessed. Predetermined outcomes become a restrictive and unattainable condition of grantmaking as the fixation is on what the institution can see, touch or feel in order to have the sense that they are getting their money's worth, whatever they decide that that looks like.

*“At Decolonising Economics we have funders reach out to us all the time because they’re commissioning research. It’s like they’re taking something, abstracting it as much as possible and then making it as complex as possible. And it makes sense because most people who work in this type of stuff have had their needs met most of their lives so how would you even start to understand people that don’t.”*

***Nonhlanhla Makuyana***

## **So what could this look like instead?**

Resourcing our community ourselves is possible. Communities can, do and have pooled funds to sustain essential community work locally, regionally and transnationally. We see this in the sweeping successes of crowdfunders during the COVID-19 pandemic, a moment of crises for so many individuals and organisations.

Community giving often cuts through much of institutional philanthropy's shortcomings, it is more generous, more sustainable and enables better, deeper movement work. Here's how.

*"I think I always separate philanthropy as an institution from philanthropy as a practice. So when you think of it as a practice, the practice is about what people give within their communities.*

*People of colour in philanthropy, what has made them really good at their work is not that they have integrated into the system, but the fact that they have fought against it.*

*They've gone back to some of the instincts that they've had from their communities and actually try to implement and inject that into what is a very extractive, paternalistic system."*

**Derek Bardowell**

## Trust

Good funders spent huge amounts of time and money building trust between grantmakers and grantee partners.

In the community provision model<sup>1</sup>, the hardest part of the work is done. Moving money through a network of people in relationship with one another means that for those investing their money they have deeper connection and understanding to the movement work that they are putting money into and those receiving funds are more secure in their relationships and have less 'to prove' to their donors.

The attached strings, bureaucracy and monitoring and evaluation become gently redundant and the focus can more sharply be put on leveraging funds and doing the movement work exclusively.

## **Risk**

Communities who know structural oppression<sup>2</sup> are less susceptible to the shining lights of new trends because it is their own lived realities on the line. Furthermore, they are less invested in the protection of wealth as they are not likely to be in a position of great wealth themselves.

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1 Author's note: Community provision model is an umbrella term for fundraising and leveraging resources by broad-based pooling of the resources of many individuals. It is any model in which the community provides what is needed.

2 Author's note: Structural oppression refers to the overlapping systems of which keep people marginalised and disempowered such as racism, classism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia etc. and the institutions of society which uphold them.

This means that in the community provision model, risk aversion in the name of wealth protection makes less sense. Dedication to the success of social movements<sup>1</sup> who are trying to dismantle systems of oppression is easier to sit with when those systems are not working for you, any more than it is for those movements.

### **Reach**

Giving from the margins of society i.e. from African, Afrodescendent and Black communities in a white supremacist context, means starting with a sharpened lens in terms of understanding need and access to support.

In this way, more money can touch the parts of society that are far too marginalised or suppressed and repressed for the world of philanthropy to be familiar with.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's note: A social movement is an organised constellation of individuals and collectives who are working together to make social, environmental or political change happen.

This toolkit will unpack and explain how community provision and grassroots fundraising<sup>2</sup> can support the work of movements for social and ecological liberation<sup>3</sup>.

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2 Author's note: Grassroots fundraisings are pools of money which are pulled together by and kept in the hands of individuals and collectives who do not represent an institution.

3 Author's note: Ecological liberation is freedom from oppression for all peoples and all life including non-human beings.

# Grassroots fundraising & community provision



In 2021 feminist economist Âurea Mouzinho did a survey of contemporary African, Afrodescendant, and Black liberatory economic practices. This sought to highlight the ways in which African, Afrodescendent and Black communities across the globe have established different ways of relating, exchanging and moving resources including labour and money. In it she offers a definition of ‘the economy’.

“If ‘the economy’ is understood as a series of relations, institutions and practices oriented towards the sustenance of livelihoods, [the Afro-Colombian and Zimbabwean traditions of] turno de dieta<sup>1</sup> and burial societies<sup>2</sup> are therefore a testament that, around the world, African, Afrodescendant and Black communities have been the custodians and

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1 Among Afrodescendant communities of Tumaco, in the South Pacific region of Colombia the practice of turno de dieta exists in which for 40 days after a child is born, neighbours organise themselves to complete household chores including cooking, cleaning, and caring for the elderly or sick; enabling new mothers to heal their bodies and regain energies to welcome their children into the world.

2 In South Africa and Zimbabwe, it is common practice for women to form burial societies, contributive schemes that their families can draw on at the time a loved one passes away. Rooted in resistance against the impoverishment of Indigenous African populations during the periods of settler colonialism.

architects of collective, care-oriented, regenerative and emancipatory economies that have persisted beyond, alongside and despite the hegemony of capitalist social relations.”

This quote is a reminder of the many ways in which we as Africans, Afrodescendants and Black communities are resourcing our communities. Financially when there is a loss in the family, with the labour of producing food and cleaning when they've endured childbirth.

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This toolkit is intended to push further into the ideation of what community provision could look like and how it could support social movements. How can the community provide effective sustainable movement support? What can grassroots fundraising – i.e. not garnered through applications to institutions – offer to the thriving of social movements?

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Other forms of community resourcing that we learnt from Âurea Mouzinho:

### › **Collective work**

“In Azeze, a rural town in Ethiopia, farmers organise themselves in collective structures known as wobbera, debo or wonfel, moving from one farm to another to



manage weeding and harvesting during the farming year. The same practice of calling for and engaging community members in collective work during planting and harvesting is at the core of the traditional Quilombola farming system, known as mutirão.

In Colombia, a similar practice is known as minga. In the context of the Afro-Colombian finca tradicional, minga is employed in territories where land is used collectively for activities of self-sufficiency and sustainability of common goods.”

## › Collective saving

“The practice of saving circles entails pooling money together by handing over a set amount each week or month. Circle members take turns receiving the pooled funds on a rotating basis. However, turns may be skipped when one member has an exceptional urgent need such as death or accident.

In Angola, the practice is commonly known as kixikila. Among Afro-Colombian communities, it is known as cadena (chain). In Nigeria and other parts of West Africa, it is called adashi. Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom term this practice as pardner or susu. Gamey’a, ekub, chiquitique and cuchubal are the denominations used in Egypt, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Guatemala.”

Other common practices of moving and organising money in African, Afrodescendent and Black communities:

### › Remittances

Or more commonly referred to as 'sending money home'. Remittances is the term given for transfer of money from someone to a personal relationship of theirs in another country. This could be their partner, friend, parent and/or the whole family or household. Hundreds of billions of US dollars are sent in remittances every year from Africans in the diaspora who send money back to their homelands

In Somalia, remittances exceed all humanitarian and development assistance and make up over 25% of the national economy.

### › Religious institutions

For many Africans, Afrodescendents and Black people who are part of a religious institution giving weekly, monthly or annually is an ingrained tradition. In churches, tithing is encouraged, the tithe originally dictating 10% of a person's income should be given to the church which in turn supports the needs of others.

That percentage may no longer be the norm across the board, but the practice of giving a periodical offering persists. In Islam, the holy month of Ramadan is a time

of gratitude and also of giving. The practice of zak'at suggests 2.5% of what you have in liquid and assets should be donated annually.

Giving in the month of Ramadan is huge. One example of what this can look like is the practice of Gambian-British actor and humanitarian Cherno Jagne. In Ramadan 2022, he ran 150km in a month in order to raise £50,000 for Afghan refugees in the US and the UK. Reflecting on his journey with the fundraiser, Cherno said: "I feel like, for me, the importance Ramadan grows more and more every year. During this month, it's really nice to humble yourself and appreciate the smallest things like a glass of water, when you break your fast. For the the majority of the Muslim community, we feel more in-tune and self aware during this month, as well as a reminder of the importance of giving to those economically marginalised in society."

## › Humanitarian crisis response

Fundraising drives immediately after a humanitarian crisis have always been a huge pillar of diaspora giving and a strong example of the impact of grassroots giving. Floods, earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, landslides, oil spills – urgent response fundraising often garners huge numbers in the earliest hours and days of crisis.

# Case studies

Stories of community provision  
from across the diaspora





## **Axmed Maxamed Somalia / Netherlands / Germany**

“I was one of the few visible khaniis Somalis online – with my name and my face on my profiles – being openly and unapologetically queer.

Being that person that means that other Somali khaniis<sup>1</sup> were then reaching out, messaging, sending direct messages, mostly about how happy they are to see an openly khaniis somali queer person that is also advocating for other khaniis Somalis.

Then after a while the messages also came from people who were in desperate need. Sometimes they came from people who had sent messages before or from complete strangers. People were messaging because they were in a very difficult situation, afraid because they were in a country where they

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<sup>1</sup> This is the word that Axmed uses, which means queer. It is being reclaimed by some of the Somali queer community but just like queer there are a lot of people who still see it as a problem.

were undocumented and didn't have connections with other Somali queers.

They reached out online and asked me if I can help them. These were people that ran away from their family for example and needed a place to stay or a way to survive. Or people who wanted to apply for asylum in the place that they were but didn't know how to, for example because they don't speak the language. And then they found me.

Often the thing they need most urgently is funds. Before, everytime someone reached out and needed help I was paying out of pocket. At some point it got so much that I couldn't do it any more, I couldn't afford it. I already had a platform because of my work in music and activism so then

*«They reached out online and asked me if I can help them.»*

when people were reaching out, needing financial support, the first thing that came to mind is 'okay, I'll share it on my platform and see if people can help.'

Usually then I put my PayPal link to connect funds. Almost always they don't have the means to get the money directly. Often they are refugees who have fled Somalia and other countries documented or undocumented. They don't have a PayPal, they don't have a way the money can get to them, the only way is that the money comes to me and I find a way to get it to them. More often than not I'm not able to raise

enough of what is needed so I contribute a bit myself.

Sending money and survival is one thing and then there is the need for sustaining oneself and being able to continue.

There was someone from an east African city that I helped financially and in other ways to help him get settled there.

When someone who reached out to me was trying to flee to a

*«No matter how oppressive a government or society is there are always people resisting and the key is to find them.»*

city in east Africa, I told them that I know a fellow Somali khaniis in a neighbouring city with the east Africa region and suggested they go there instead.

Both of them are now in community together and are

gradually connecting with others. They recently asked me to help them set up a small business and I was able to do that through mutual aid fundraising and additional funds that I added. Their goal is to use the profit from this business to support themselves and for this to continue to be in Somali queer hands, even if they were to go to other countries. Their wish is also for it to be a hub for other Somali queers who are new to the country.

No matter how oppressive a government or society is there are always people resisting and the key is to find them.”

## **What works?**

### **Trust**

Trust enables low infrastructure and fast moving support to be easily accessible even to those who are too vulnerable or marginalised in a society to access formal financial infrastructure. By garnering the trust of donors, Axmed is able to be light footed, responsive, efficient and effective with his giving.

## **What are the threats?**

### **Capacity**

Axmed named that his capacity is limited and that he needs more support so that things can happen in his absence. It is common that when we set things up off our own backs, trying to share the ownership and responsibility of our projects, and transfer the relationships takes work. Building out projects like this collaboratively with support structures around could prevent hitting that capacity wall.

## **Where does Axmed think are the gaps?**

### **1. Racist financial institutions**

«Money transfer companies are highly racist and Islamophobic. You are very much scrutinised if you want to send money to East Africa. Most of the time I fall back to



Somali xawala<sup>1</sup> whose clientele is 90% Somali.»

## 2. Better Infrastructure

«What I've noticed is that almost 100% of people who've reached out for help are cis men or people who were socialised as men. This doesn't mean somali queer people of other genders don't need help it just means because that's who I am.

If there were an entity, people who aren't like me but who are in need would have somewhere to reach out to. I would like to set that up, but don't have the capacity.»

## 3. Diversity in giving

«It's almost always the same people that give. Depending on how far a callout reaches and who reshares it, there are always a few new names.

Most of the time it's people that have already supported other callouts I did. 90% of people are Black or other racialised people, people who are queer themselves. The urgency is so high that even people who don't have a lot to spare feel the need to give. But it's sad that it always falls on the same people.»

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<sup>1</sup> Xawala is a popular and informal system of value transfer based, not on the circulation of money through banks, but on the activity of a network of money brokers.

## What's Axmed's advice on how to DIY fundraise for your community?

«Find the need for direct support because wherever you are there's someone around you who needs direct support. Find the people already doing it. Ask them what you can do - if doing fundraising is helpful. There's no 'five point plan' but these things I think are important.»

If you would like to contribute monthly or periodically to Axmed's work you can do so via [paypal.me/axm3d](https://paypal.me/axm3d) or e-mail him on [axm3dm@gmail.com](mailto:axm3dm@gmail.com) with subject line 'Queer Somali Support' or message him on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) @axmedamiinmax on both. If you are not able to contribute but know people who are, please share it with them. Also if you are able to help him set up an entity or a website, please reach out.



## **Nonhlanhla Makuyana Zimbabwe / UK**

«I've been thinking a lot about how, when I was growing up, my grandmother was the collector of the monies, in burial societies.

It is such a huge part of the community that if you need something, it is available for you if you ask someone.

*«If people need stuff,  
you just give it to them.  
That's just it.»*

That's something that was organised, and lots of relationships are organised around that.

People want places to sleep, people want to eat, to have nice experiences. In philanthropy spaces there was just so much complexity and a need to theorise, make it academic. If people need stuff, you just give it to them. That's just it. Start with people from your immediate community.

Funders often try and reach people in so many different places in a way that sometimes creates a lot of harm. They try to generalise needs that are actually quite specific which makes sense because people who work in this stuff

*«You can't take what my grandma did and then put it across fifty different situations or generalise it.»*

have often always had their material needs met.

Going back to my grandma and the burial society, even though she's not a funder, that small ecosystem in the relationships that she had

in her immediate network were what were important. You can't take what my grandma did and then put it across fifty different situations or generalise it.

Maybe that's the difference between funding and grassroots giving. I don't know.»



## Anonymous

«I have a friend who organises around Black liberation.

They went to university with this person who was half Black, half white, 21 years old and had inherited all of this money from their dad's side (their white side). Apparently their dad had lied about the family history so they didn't even know the money was there until they inherited it.

They brought me on and we talked about what we wanted to do with the money. We wanted to support Black people that were organising and that had probably never been given funding before. And also people who had done lots of work but had never really received money for that work. For

*«We divided all the money across everyone, funding about 25 individuals and grassroots groups between £2k-5k.»*

example, for small bits of support that some people offer to others but that won't get paid or you won't get funding for.

I broke down the money in small different bits. We had an 'Emergency survival fund' for things like rent, deposit, bills, debt. 'Healing and medical' for therapy, physiotherapy, dental and 'gift' for individuals, groups and collectives we wanted to support.

Then we divided all the money across everyone, funding about 25 individuals and grassroots groups between £2k-5k.

The person didn't want any reporting, nor were they interested in people knowing who they were. They just wanted to transfer the money in their bank app and that was it - people didn't have to know it was them. We tried to not take away from the capacity that the individuals and groups had by not creating any work to do but instead just asking them for their bank details to deposit the cash.

*«We were just like 'take the money and do what you want with it.' »*

The money was just time to just do what they wanted. Some people put it into a savings account for their child, some people didn't want the

money. We funded queer and trans led collectives, migrant-led organisers working on migration, spiritual political collectives that had never received funding and left £5k to other fundraisers for later down the line.

We were just like 'take the money and do what you want with it.' At the end, we don't want to hear about it.



## **Stella Dadzie** **Ghana / UK**

«Money was always needed but in a very different context.»

### **> About Stella Dadzie**

Stella Dadzie is a Black feminist activist and founding member of the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) as well as a former member of the Brixton Black Women's group. Active in the late 1970s and 80s as part of the British Civil Rights movement, she was recently described as one of the 'grandmothers' of Black Feminism in the UK. She is a published writer and historian, best known for *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's lives in Britain* which won the 1985 Martin Luther King Award for Literature and *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance* released in October 2021.

## What did fundraising for a Black feminist movement in 1970s/80s London look like?

«Firstly, I will caveat this by saying I'm going back forty, fifty years back remembering this. Money was always needed but in a very different context. You didn't have fund giving

*«We didn't have huge resources and we didn't need huge resources..»*

mechanisms in place so there was an expectation that you were self-reliant.

If we needed money, we thought nothing of organising

a jumble sale, a blues<sup>1</sup>. At OWAAD the way we raised money was through charging a small membership fee which enabled us to have some kind of pot of money accessible if needed. We sold our newsletter, we often put money in the pot ourselves. We didn't have huge resources and we didn't need huge resources. No one ever got paid. We probably spent, in total, about a few hundred quid a year.

Quite often we met in people's front rooms or in local community spaces that were available to us. Nowadays, people expect a kind of remuneration if they rent out their space which wasn't the case. I can't remember ever needing a huge amount of money. For the OWAAD conferences one

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<sup>1</sup> A Blues is a dance party.



of the members would have negotiated a space for us to use for free. Also, there was a growing expectation for the Local Authority to facilitate those kinds of spaces for us.

We thought nothing in Tottenham of lobbying the council for an old school building that was no longer in use and basically they gave it to us to use as a women's centre.»

### › **How Black feminist movements of 1970s London sustained themselves**

- **Jumble sales** - collecting donated clothes, books, household goods etc. and reselling them
  - **Newspapers** - writing, printing and selling independent media
  - **Membership** - charging a nominal fee to cover basic costs
- Bucket shaking - rattling a tin in busy places so people could donate in exchange for merchandise
- **Blues** - charging for entry and drinks / gathering donations from the crowd

## How did people in movements relate to money?

Some of the women in Brixton Black Women's Group were coming from a Black Panther context where self-reliance was one of the key tenets of the organisation. The idea that we need to learn to do this stuff for ourselves.

*«There was lots of collectivity, pulling together, making sure everyone was alright.»*

As well as the Black power influence there was also this Pan-African notion of brotherhood, sisterhood, collective caring. I'm not trying to idealise it, we did

have our isms and schisms and megalomaniacs and all the things that go on. But there was a sense of we are a family, the African family. Those who didn't have were supported wherever possible.

For example if we knew a sister had difficulty raising her fare to get to a conference or a meeting, we would pool our resources to make sure she had a ticket. There was lots of collectivity, pulling together, making sure everyone was alright.

### › 3 ideological reasons to think beyond grant funding

- The Black Power notion of self-reliance
- The solidarity framework of pan-Africanism
- Resistance to the 'divide and rule' of competitive funding pots

## What happened when grant funding first became available?

Post 1981, following widespread uprisings across the UK, you had Race Equality and Women's Equality units popping up all over the place.

*«You saw people have to tweak what they were doing to fit the funding criteria.»*

They all had access to a pot of money so for a period of time there was a mechanism for accessing funding for specific things. You applied on the basis of your ethnicity,

you applied on the basis of a very specific set of aims and objectives which were often determined by the fund giver. In a very subtle and subliminal way you saw people have to tweak what they were doing to fit the funding criteria.

The impact on our communities was a degree of divide and rule but also a whittling away of that self-reliance because you no longer felt the need to raise the funds yourself.

It's a balancing act, being totally self-reliant and not so proud or so suspicious that you don't take money from anyone. There has to be a happy medium somewhere between those extremes.

### › **The grant funding trap in the UK context : then and now**

Then as now, grant-makers wielded their power to set and influence political agendas. This included dividing groups by ethnicity so multi-ethnic coalitions found it difficult to get funding and multi-ethnic solidarity was less resourced.





## Africans in the Diaspora United States

Africans in the Diaspora (AiD) emerged as a crowdfunding platform to demonstrate the powerful impact that collective resources, skills, and ideas pooled from Africans—both on the continent and in the diaspora—can have in regards to supporting the leadership and work of grassroots movements. Founded in 2012, AiD envisioned a self-reliant Africa. Its co-founders created AiD as a platform to connect Africans in the diaspora and on the continent committed to African-owned, -driven, and -led transformative change.

In 2013 AiD led a successful fundraising campaign «New Year New Aid» raising over \$36,000 for three movement partners. In response to the Ebola epidemic, in 2014 AiD created the “Africa Responds” campaign, led by Thousand Currents’ Executive Director, Solomé Lemma. The campaign raised over \$100,000 for eight grassroots organisations in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

### What did AiD teach us?

AiD showed us that Africans give, Afrodescendants give, Black people give. It demonstrated Black-led redistribution of wealth could fund work that was not catching the attention of Global North funders, and that sometimes the best strategy is Do It Yourself.



With a range of fundraising purposes, AiD crucially demonstrated that African diaspora fundraising could be sustainable and could support social movements not just once but repeatedly.

And contrary to the belief that people only give back to their country of origin, AiD showed us that diaspora to continent giving can be pan-African.



# Resourcing your community

How could you apply these learnings?





# Grounding your practice: what did we hear in our case studies and analysis?

## 1. Find the space of highest trust

Where are your relationships best set up to support the transfer of resources? Where is the overlap between where you want to give, and strong, trusting relationships you hold or that it makes sense for you to develop?

We of course may need to break out of our bubble to give where we think there is the highest need. We may not. But identifying where the nexuses of trust are better enables us to see where to start and what trust-building work we should be factoring into our process.

## 2. Purging ourselves of capitalist logic

Release the idea that you can control the impact of this money. The act of giving ends when the resource transfer is complete. Do not await a return on investment. Release the resource and have faith in the rest.

Release the idea that having money or access to it makes someone special or worthy. We are not more or less special because of our proximity to wealth.

Narratives of meritocracy are pervasive, so we must be mindful of where they have worked their way through us.

Meditate on the notion that money is power. Yes, withdrawal or release of money is used as a tool of coercion. Yes, movements have moved with or without resources for centuries. Enslaved peoples rose up from abjection, colonised lands protected colonised guerilla fighters whose armies were built using a fraction of the resource available to their soon-to-be-defeated oppressors. There are many contradicting realities around the role of money in our worlds.

When gathering and working with money ask yourself which ones you believe. How is that impacting the way you hold power in your work? How is this aligned or misaligned with the values that drove you to the work in the first place?

### **3. Centering the spirit of pan-African solidarity, self-reliance and meeting unmet needs<sup>1</sup>**

If you are struggling to shrug off the last shreds of capitalism's grip, focusing on the pan-African spirit of solidarity can offer an anchor which illuminates our interconnectedness and inter-reliance.

Principles such as ubuntu - I am because we are - remind us that individualism was only ever a myth. We are all essential

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<sup>1</sup> Author's note: Unmet needs is a term often used in reference to physical and mental health, where someone seeking help leaves an interaction without the sufficient care, attention and/or resolution. Society can also fail to meet needs by creating and reproducing systems in which people are not materially or emotionally sufficiently supported and cared for.

pieces of the puzzle and solidarity means making each piece as solid as the next.

*“To not be a funder is to actually reflect on the small ecosystems that you exist within and [see what you can do within your] immediate network You can’t take what my grandma did and then put it across 50 different situations or generalise it. Maybe that’s the difference between funding and grassroots giving.”*

***Nonhlanhla Makuyana***

## **To be or not to be(come a funder)**

In conversation with Nonhlanhla and Axmed we saw the question of infrastructure and professionalisation emerge. So where is the line between community provision and being a funder? Do we need this line at all or should we be open to becoming donors ourselves?

### **What we are avoiding**

Bureaucracy for bureaucracy’s sake. This is where institutions get created because infrastructure is needed and then the infrastructure breeds bureaucracy which breeds more and more jobs. Often at this point, the institution seeks to sustain itself in the preservation of jobs more so than the drive towards achieving purpose and gets trapped in a cycle of mindless growth.

## What we want

Sustainable infrastructure. To enable smooth and consistent movement of money to where it is needed. What would it look like to stop at infrastructure and go deeper into the relationships which support it and not wider into bureaucratic webs? Axmed's suggestion was an incredibly low-tech website that sat on the line of "enough infrastructure to be sustainable, and not too much to become over-bureaucratic". What could that look like for you?

*"If there were an entity, people who aren't like me but who are in need would have somewhere to reach out to. I would like to set that up, but don't have the capacity."*

**Axmed Maxamed**

## What does giving well look like?

When giving to social movements, over a long period of time, for the first time here are a few key approaches that will help make the money you move the least obstructive possible.

› **Flexible, core and long term where possible**

In the words of Nonhlanhla “lots of needs are fashionable even when they are always there.” Funding what’s no longer fashionable because it’s still under-resourced is essential. Funding project-based work without funding the core infrastructure that underpins it also applies unproductive pressure to partners.

Fund people, collectives or organisations but never projects alone. Change also takes time. Fund over a number of years where you can.

› **Accountable decision-making**

Whether using participatory grantmaking models, invite only funds or open application processes there are a number of ways that privilege and bias shows up in selection processes.

Make sure you have a number of eyes on your selection process who can account for how class, proximity to whiteness, racialised notions of ‘professionalism’ etc. are colouring your decision making process.

› **Continuous learning based on mutual trust**

It's a lot of work tracking how people spend their money. It hugely inflates the labour of the one who is giving as well as receiving the money. No reporting can mean almost no bureaucracy: this can be a dream where legally viable.

The motive behind monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should therefore be rigorously interrogated.

White-led philanthropic institutions generally use monitoring and evaluation to ensure that what they thought they were funding, is in fact what they funded.

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation can provide effective feedback systems so that you understand what is working and not working about the way you are moving money.

Monitoring and evaluation becomes less and less relevant the higher that the trust is before money is moved, and the sharper the grant-maker's capacity to identify need. Before defaulting to an overly complicated monitoring and evaluation just ask - monitoring and evaluating for what?



# Receiving from your community

How could your community resource you?

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If you are part of a social movement or collective that wants to sustain their work through community provision, there are a number of existing models to get started on this journey. Here are a few.

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# Crowdfunding

## > Pros

- It's a tried and tested model that has supported scores of social movements.
- It's loud and gets your name out there, people often learn about organisations through the crowdfunders they run.
- There are always surprises - you could get more than you ask for. In January 2022 Black bookshop, New Beacon Books, overshot their fundraising target by £50,000GBP in just eight days.

## > Cons

- There are always surprises - you could get less than you expect.
- The higher the profile the more funds you'll bring in, building a virtual following may be a mission drift for your movement.

## **Role of Small Business**

*“When crises occur in homelands, it’s usually a topic of discussion in café’s and restaurants frequented by those communities.*

*I know for example during these current droughts, Somali businesses have been donating portions of profits to support drought victims in East Africa.*

*When I worked for the Anti-Tribalism Movement, I helped to set up an international university scholarship for students in Somalia.*

*Local Somali businesses hosted our digital donation machine at the till so customers could give on their way out of the restaurant.”*

**Faiza Ali**

## Membership models

### > Pros

- Membership income is consistent and trust-based.
- You can charge on a sliding scale so that membership is not a barrier to access.

### > Cons

- You have to have strong relationships with your base
- These require considerable numbers to make considerable money.

## Role of media and parties

### > Pros

- If having your own media, a place to present your own narratives and stories is beneficial to your work this can serve a dual purpose.
- Throwing parties can be a good way to spread the word about your work and connect with folks too.

### > Cons

- Unlike in Stella's era people are much less acclimatised to paying for media, digital and print alike. This might make it difficult to build trust with the community if your media requires a lot of pushing and you are perceived as a salesperson or marketer.
- Overheads on parties can get expensive so you may need quite a tight business model to avoid putting more capacity in than you want

## Influencers

*“There is definitely a space for diaspora influencers to enhance their impact in this space. We all see the difference that one tweet or post from a well-revered celeb/influencer can make.*

*Often, this is quite sporadic and issue-based... it would be great to include ways diaspora can engage influencers on a long-term basis.”*

***Faiza Ali***

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With all of these approaches the challenge is to balance mission and purpose with fundraising activity. If you are offering rewards or products through your membership, media, parties or crowdfunders these should already make strategic sense for your movement to produce. Otherwise, this can cause a mission drift in the name of fundraising, just as grant funding can.

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## Provocation

### How can crowdfunding and crisis response fundraising become a sustainable model?

The unique vision of Africans in the Diaspora tested the theory that pooling resources could serve movements, on a continuous rolling basis.

This was successful in that multiple crowdfunders, some themed by event, some themed by season raised enough to grant funds to movement partners. Sadly, AiD was not able to sustain a grant-making infrastructure that could offer long term grants to movements.



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More recently participatory grant-making platform [Kwanda](#) has developed a 'digital village' with monthly membership to enable multiple organisations and programmes to receive a steady stream of grants.

Is this the way forward? What would it look like for a handful of movements to develop a platform like this fundraising to develop for themselves a constant stream of crowdsourced resources? What other models can be developed through the learning and reflection in this toolkit?

## **Rich Black people:**

*“What has changed there’s a lot more rich, wealthy Black folk, and we know who they are. If I was thinking about strategies for today I’d be far more focused on those wealthy Black folk. There will come a time where we’re gonna have to ask those of us who’ve made it, to give back.”*

***Stella Dadzie***

# Conclusion

The point of this toolkit is not to prevent Africans, Afrodescendent and Black movements from ever taking grant funding again.

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Primarily, this toolkit offers an opportunity to explore other avenues to resourcing movements which can create a healthier distance from institutional philanthropy and push the work of African, Afrodescendent and Black social movements into greater freedom and fewer restrictions.

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## Organisations to follow

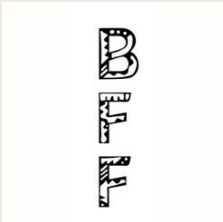


### **Decolonising Economics**

[decolonisingeconomics.org/](http://decolonisingeconomics.org/)

@ decolonisingeconomics on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)

@ DecolonisingE on [Twitter](#)



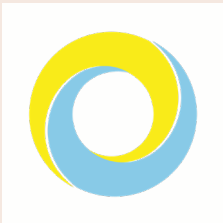
### **Black feminist fund**

[blackfeministfund.org/](http://blackfeministfund.org/)

@blackfeministfund on [Instagram](#)

@BlackFemFund on [Twitter](#)

Black Feminist Fund on [LinkedIn](#)



### **Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DEMAC)**

[www.demac.org/](http://www.demac.org/)

@DemacProject on [Twitter](#)

@demac.org on [Facebook](#)

DEMAC on [Youtube](#) and on [LinkedIn](#)



### **Kwanda**

[kwanda.co](http://kwanda.co)

@JoinKwanda on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

## Recommended readings

### **The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex**

A book by Incite! Women of Color Against  
Violence

### **The Dire State of Funding for Black Feminist Movements — and What Donors Can Do About It**

An article by Hakima Abbas on Human Rights  
Fundors Network







**Africans** in  
the **Diaspora**

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