

# HOW **INGOS** AND **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS** COLLABORATE TO TRANSFORM GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

NEW ALLIES REPORT 2023





**ASHOKA** NEW ALLIES REPORT 2023

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Most importantly, we would like to thank the **social entrepreneurs** and **social innovation leaders** from INGOs, United Nations agencies and other organizations without whom this work would not be possible. We are deeply grateful for your insights and for your fierce commitment to the betterment of our world.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the **research team** who carried out this work. This team was comprised of contributors from Ashoka's Africa, Europe, and Global Impact and Evidence teams, the Polytechnic University of Milan, and the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers.

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# FOREWORD

The problems we face in the 21st century are of an unprecedented scale; they are multifaceted, interconnected, quickly evolving, and fundamentally systemic. For solutions to outpace challenges, it requires local changemakers and leaders to realize innovation at scale.

By being part of the communities they serve, social entrepreneurs have the depth of understanding needed to address the problems from within. They not only co-create solutions that cater to multiple stakeholders, they also build the conditions for everyone to contribute to the desired change. They forge unlikely alliances to shift behaviour, beliefs and rules that enable communities and societies to equitably distribute resources to elicit change. And they empower local communities to take action, to use their capacities and resources to be changemakers for and with their communities and thus create long-term sustainable change.

Forty years back, Ashoka started its work with the mission to place system changing social entrepreneurs – proximate leaders – at the centre of the world’s global development effort. Now, 4,000 Ashoka Fellows around the world are proving that citizens have the power and capacity to drive systems change – they do so by inspiring others to recognize a new reality is possible and create new roles for many others to be changemakers. While there is increasing recognition about the importance of putting local changemakers in charge, the global aid system is locked in an old modus operandi. In fact, in 2020 the OECD reports that less than 1% of total Official Development Assistance went directly to developing-country based civil society organizations.

It goes without saying that the interconnected problems are beyond the capacity of any single actor to adequately tackle. No one local changemaker nor any one policy maker has all the prerequisite knowledge, capacity, network, or resources to drive change alone. Collaboration and partnership are the only way forward.

In this report we see how large International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are allies to social entrepreneurs. They play an important role in supporting social entrepreneurs to drive change at scale. The report showcases successful collaborations between INGOs and social entrepreneurs in Africa. The examples featured in this report prove that we can overcome partnership challenges and power imbalances. We offer a range of recommendations for key actors in the ecosystem to catalyze more such partnerships, including those with funders.

This report is a call to action. For decades Ashoka has helped to build bridges between social entrepreneurs and important allies, such as philanthropists, governments, and corporations. And now, it’s time to build this bridge with big INGOs. As you will see in this report, this bridge is important, not just to enable grassroots innovators to unleash

their potential, but also to further re-frame, innovate, and re-organize the practice of international development as such, as well as seek out solutions that work for everyone.

We hope that this report will spark the interest and engagement necessary to foster collaborations to tackle the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. To do that we know we need policies and practice that ensure more people proximate to the problem are building local and global solutions – more changemakers working for the good of all – this is the only way to make longer term change that lasts. With this approach, solutions will outrun problems and every individual will have the ability to identify challenges and create positive outcomes. When we build a world where everyone has the capacity to participate, will we finally be able to find solutions that work for everyone. In fact, this ‘Everyone a Changemaker’ world may be the only way we can reach the Sustainable Development Goals.

Thank you to the many individuals who have shared their insights for this report. Special thanks to CARE International: It is our collaboration with CARE which sparked the questions leading to this endeavor.



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# FOR A BETTER FUTURE

More than 1.3 billion people are still living in poverty, majority of whom are women and children.

New challenges are growing the need and even reversing progress. The problems we are dealing with today are increasingly complex, dynamic, and networked. No one actor can address these alone. It is crucial that we find new and innovative ways to tackle societal challenges as the world is not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

It is undeniable that international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like CARE and social enterprises and their networks like Ashoka are important players in addressing these problems. INGOs have a global impact and the ability to influence political decisions, while social enterprises can drive change through their innovation and entrepreneurship.

The present research study is inspired by a three-year pilot project between Ashoka and CARE which tested the collaboration potential between CARE and social entrepreneurs in East Africa. The substantive goals of both CARE and Ashoka have exciting intersections, even if working methods and cultures are different. It is important to embrace these challenges and work together to find solutions in order to effectively tackle societal challenges.

In this report, we highlight successful examples of collaboration between large INGOs and social enterprises considering advantages and challenges. We also discuss the future prospects for closer collaboration providing recommendations not only to INGOs and social entrepreneurs but also to funders and intermediaries in the larger ecosystem.

We hope that this report will contribute to promoting the collaboration between international organizations and social enterprises and will serve as a reference for future cooperation.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we call attention to the largely untapped potential of collaborations between social entrepreneurs and big International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to scale impact and drive systemic change.

## **Social entrepreneurs are developing and implementing innovative solutions in communities across the world.**

While their proximity to the communities they serve provides them unparalleled expertise and network access to create systemic solutions informed by local context, they often lack the robust resources—financial and otherwise—needed to scale and replicate their solutions.

## **INGOs are powerful actors in global civil society.**

Exemplified by organizations such as Oxfam, Save the Children, CARE, Plan International, SOS Children’s Villages, and the Red Cross, INGOs marshal global reach and extensive expertise. With thousands of employees across multiple global locations and annual budgets larger than those of some Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donor countries, INGOs deliver aid on a massive scale.

## **INGOs and social entrepreneurs bring unique and complementary value to their collaborations.**

This synergy can be integral to spotlighting and scaling innovative solutions to entrenched and persistent social and environmental challenges. INGOs can play an important role as connectors, brokers, and partners for social entrepreneurs to accelerate impact. Social entrepreneurs’ tested solutions can scale through the program delivery power and (international) reach of INGOs. INGOs and social entrepreneurs can combine their know-how and co-create programs to better serve their target populations.

## **These collaborations can advance the international development sector toward more inclusive, localized, and co-created action.**

As the funding gap required to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) widens, the call for new approaches to solve the world’s most pressing challenges grows louder. The system of international development is transforming as a result. There is a growing awareness and commitment to redirect international funding to local organizations and to dismantle colonial structures in aid. It’s time to place social entrepreneurs and local changemakers at the center of this system. We believe that an increase in mutually beneficial, sustained, and intensive collaborations between INGOs and social entrepreneurs will accelerate this momentum.

## **INGOs are in a unique position to reimagine development.**

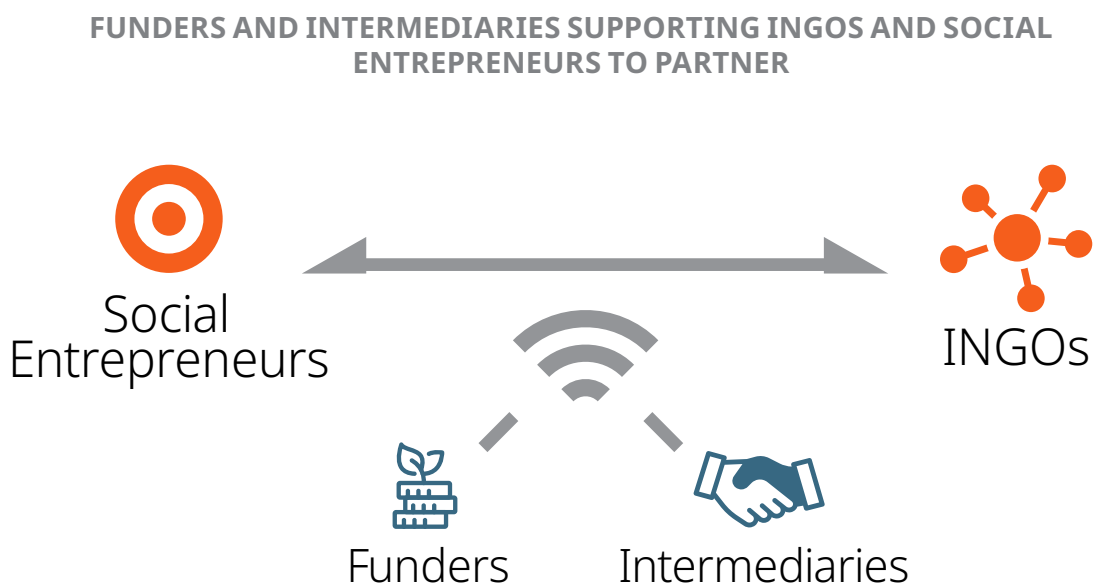
As this report shows, many INGOs are getting ready to deliver on this promise, despite myriad organizational barriers that can often slow down change. They hire innovative talent and build internal capacity in service of innovation. They enable their staff to share and build innovative ideas. They support and collaborate with social entrepreneurs. They strengthen local ecosystems of social innovation through lobbying and creating access to international funding and networks. They are starting to redefine their role, shifting from direct service organizations to scaling platforms. Most INGO leaders interviewed for this report said that the next frontier for their organizations is to engage in long-term strategic partnerships with social entrepreneurs to scale impact and to drive systemic change.

## **Social entrepreneurs provide expertise, solutions, and local ownership.**

Whether in relation to a novel technology, understanding of cultural nuances, or financial sustainability, social entrepreneurs offer expertise in areas that INGOs may be unfamiliar with. Social entrepreneurs create locally-driven solutions to address seemingly intractable problems—problems that INGOs, too, seek to address. When an INGO is looking to serve a target population, social entrepreneurs can step in with their tried-and-true solutions or can join forces to co-create new ones. Social entrepreneurs' mindsets and agile organizational structures allow them to operate their organizations as quasi-laboratories. They are constantly experimenting, iterating, and optimizing – critical approaches to increase effectiveness of aid.

## **This report aims to explore both the opportunities and challenges of such collaborations.**

It gives attention to the why's and how-to's of INGO-social entrepreneurship partnership models, and the barriers that INGOs and social entrepreneurs are facing in their attempt to working together. We hope that this will help to evaluate partnership potentials, foster mutual understanding, and increase the quality and number of collaborations, leading ultimately to greater impact.



## **A supportive environment for partnerships between INGOs and social entrepreneurs can be built.**

We have identified several measures that INGOs, social entrepreneurs, funders, and intermediaries (i.e., organizations that support social entrepreneurs) can take to unlock the potential of these collaborations and systemic social innovation.

### **This report is a means to an end, not an end in itself.**

There is relatively little research on how INGOs collaborate with social entrepreneurs to catalyze new and innovative strategies for tackling pressing global issues, but a clear urgency to understand and support the role of INGOs in driving social innovation in collaboration with social entrepreneurs.

### **This report is adding to the conversation.**

Its insights are based on interviews with 35 social entrepreneurs and innovation leaders, mostly from INGOs. In addition, we surveyed 29 social entrepreneurs quantitatively, and held round tables, workshops, and informal discussions with many social innovators on the issue that informed the report. We hope that many more will join us in building transformative partnerships to advance progress on the SDGs.



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# CORE ELEMENTS

## WHAT INGOS CAN DO



1

- **Treat social entrepreneurs as partners** and engage them as experts, solution providers, co-creators, and research partners. Build purposeful relationships based on mutual trust, equality, and learning, that mobilize the complementary strengths of both to address a challenge or opportunity.
- **Make social innovation a strategic priority.** While INGOs are trending in the right direction, to make progress, INGOs must be all-in. Leadership needs to make its commitment to innovation unequivocal, reinforced by the organization's operations, strategic direction, and funding allocation.
- **Build an organizational culture of innovation** by promoting openness, maintaining an outward focus, and cultivating leadership that encourages risk taking, creative problem solving, empathy and co-creation. INGOs can devote resources for their staff to develop these mindsets and capabilities.
- **Reflect on the "power footprint."** INGOs hold responsibility to work towards decolonizing aid and to improve their organizations' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agenda. This includes transferring power to local organizations and creating the conditions for local partners to lead change.

# CORE ELEMENTS

## WHAT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS CAN DO


# 2

- **Continue to take the lead** in experimenting and testing solutions. Social entrepreneurs iterate, learn, adapt, and bring solutions to market more quickly than INGOs can. The social entrepreneur's commitment to experimentation, and experimentation's ability to "de-risk" innovation are key assets for INGOs.
- **Build relationships and networks with INGOs.** Develop a better understanding of how INGOs operate and the challenges they face. Through INGOs, social entrepreneurs get access to (inter)national structures of power, and in turn, can become accountability partners for their work locally.
- **Leverage expertise and knowledge of the local context.** Social entrepreneurs have an unmatched expertise in the local contexts in which they work. They have experience building sustainable ventures with local stewardship. These are crucial assets they can offer in their partnerships.



# CORE ELEMENTS


## WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO



3

- **Provide more direct and flexible funding for innovation.** Funders need to provide more financial support for social innovation, especially for INGO-social entrepreneur collaborations. Planning grants facilitate partnership building. Targeted grants foster organizational readiness for innovation.
- **Innovate operating funding models.** Align funding practice to the needs of social entrepreneurs and innovative partnership models. Implement impact-linked financing, which involves the need to achieve impact-related benchmarks. Improve access to concessional funding for local innovators.
- **Incentivize partnership, innovation and systems change.** Incentivize INGO-social entrepreneur collaboration through funding programs that require partnership with social entrepreneurs. Funders can offer funding pathways for collaborations to move from prototyping to institutionalization.
- **Foster experimentation and learning.** Enable experimentation and agility in delivery and management of grants. Funders can provide sufficient resources to mine challenges and failures for lessons that will lead to future advancement. Support sound knowledge management

# CORE ELEMENTS



# 4

## WHAT INTERMEDIARIES CAN DO

- **Facilitate collaboration.** Source, select and connect social entrepreneurs interested in partnering with INGOs. Specialized social entrepreneurship support organizations bring the expertise to facilitate strategic collaborations and scaling partnerships. They can help to improve organizational readiness.
- **Share knowledge.** Enhance learning across the social innovation field by identifying and showcasing best practices. Intermediaries can leverage their specialized knowledge to better prepare INGOs for partnership with social entrepreneurs and advance their social innovation efforts.
- **Consider INGOs as part of the ecosystem.** Learn how INGOs operate, spot opportunities for INGO-social entrepreneur collaboration, and identify systemic barriers that INGOs and social entrepreneurs can jointly tackle.

# BACKGROUND

## EVOLUTION OF INGOS' SOCIAL INNOVATION EFFORTS

A little over a decade ago, the development sector started to take interest in social entrepreneurship. This interest was motivated by the push for the international development sector to adopt private sector approaches.<sup>1</sup>

INGOs began to support social entrepreneurs by advocating for the development of inclusive market systems – i.e., market systems that “engage and benefit a range of marginalized groups who are often excluded—or even exploited—by traditional market systems.”<sup>2</sup>In partnership with intermediaries and with that shared mission of supporting inclusive markets, INGOs built incubators and accelerators to find, bolster, and scale local social enterprises in undercapitalized regions. The establishment of these programs signaled the international development sector’s budding commitment to social entrepreneurship as a strategy for addressing the needs of marginalized communities and creating a more equitable world.

Inspired by their staff’s initiative to support social entrepreneurs and inclusive business, INGOs began looking within their own ranks for intrapreneurs and building a culture where intrapreneurs’ ideas could thrive. They offered capacity-building and leadership programs, and they set up innovation funds to support prototyping and business planning. As ideas evolved into projects and eventually to promising results, INGOs took advantage of opportunities to spin out these successes into independent social enterprises, attracting investment from a range of market actors.

Since 2015, INGOs have moved to institutionalize innovation by establishing in-house resources (e.g., dedicated innovation departments) to improve the management of social innovation. Although this level of institutional commitment remains relatively underdeveloped, innovation is manifesting increasingly as a key point of INGO strategy and organizational design. INGOs have started to invite external organizations to participate in organized calls for new ideas to unresolved development issues, often referred to as “challenges,” and have experimented with new forms of partnerships to address them.

Most INGO leaders interviewed for this report said that the next frontier for their organizations is to engage in long-term strategic partnerships with social entrepreneurs to scale impact and to drive systemic change. As of late, the value of these partnerships has been continually reinforced by trends in international development thought leadership and the larger movement to dismantle colonial structures in aid.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.humanitarianfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The-Future-of-Humanitarian-NGOs-HFP-Discussion-Paper-Aug20131.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.marketlinks.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/Market\\_Systems\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.marketlinks.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/Market_Systems_Framework.pdf)



Below we have outlined three particularly powerful systemic drivers of social innovation and collaboration between INGOs and social entrepreneurs.

- **The Innovation for Development Agenda:** As the funding gap required to achieve the SDGs widens, the call for new approaches to solve the world’s most pressing challenges grows louder. The actions and focus of large development agencies are evidence of this intensifying call. In the early 2010s, United Nations’ agencies began to develop innovation initiatives. Subsequently, in 2011, the members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee established innovation departments within their aid organizations. By 2015, the International Development Alliance formed, and in 2017, the G7 endorsed the Whistlers Principles to Accelerate Innovation in Development Impact<sup>3</sup>, stating that “...innovation is pivotal to reach sustained, scalable and practical solutions to the world’s complex development problems.” Two years later, UNDPs’ Accelerator Lab Initiative became one of the global flagship experiments to re-imagine development at scale. In short, each of these instances marked international development’s on-ramp to innovation.
- **The Localization Agenda:** It has long been recommended that international development agencies recognize that local leadership and ownership are essential for fostering sustainable development. While some may nod their heads in agreement, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget allocates very little to local civil society organizations (CSOs). In fact, ODA allocated less than one percent of its aid budget to developing-country based CSOs in 2020.<sup>4</sup> In response, USAID pledged to provide 25 percent of its funding directly to local organizations by 2025, such as civil society organizations, social businesses, and other community-serving institutions.<sup>5</sup> This was one giant step forward, and we hope, a harbinger of funds to follow to support locally-led development.
- **Decolonization of Foreign Assistance:** Unfortunately, as is true for many sectors, one can observe an unequal distribution of power and structural racism in the international aid sector. Some of these patterns are especially noticeable in relationships between INGOs and local actors. Decision-making structures can be non-inclusive, outdated language has been used in communications, and local knowledge is not often invited to the executive’s table. Given this reality, INGOs have been called to reflect on their “power footprint,” i.e., “...the centralization of power, resources and assets within the INGO at the expense of local organizations”<sup>6</sup>, and to put plans in place for the transfer of power and resources to local organizations.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/dev/180602-innovation.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2022.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://globalgovernanceforum.org/global-embrace-localization-changing-power-dynamics-development-humanitarian-aid-systems/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://blog.werobotics.org/2021/10/10/power-footprint-ingos/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PD-Decolonising-Aid-Report.pdf>

## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

There has been ample and sustained research on the valuable roles both INGOs and social entrepreneurs play in delivering tried and tested solutions to hunger, disease, and other pressing global issues, but there has been relatively little research on how INGOs collaborate with social entrepreneurs to catalyze new and innovative strategies for tackling these problems.

In the face of runaway inequality, the increasing pace of climate catastrophes, and escalating geopolitical conflicts, there is clear urgency to understand and support the role of INGOs in driving social innovation in partnership with social entrepreneurs.

By illuminating how INGOs and social entrepreneurs propel social innovation, we hope and anticipate that the insights and frameworks shared in this report will accomplish several objectives.

**First**, we hope that this report will enable greater understanding of and interest in social innovation and collaborations between INGOs and social entrepreneurs, particularly among stakeholders who are well-positioned to influence and support these collaborations. Smart, evidence-guided action begins with knowledge, and furnishing this knowledge is a primary objective of this report.

**Second**, as we highlight the importance of collaboration between INGOs and social entrepreneurs in this report, we hope to see more of these types of partnerships. As we elaborate in the following sections, INGOs and social entrepreneurs bring unique and complementary value to their collaborations, and this synergy can be integral to spotlighting and scaling innovative solutions to entrenched and persistent social and environmental challenges.

**Third**, we aim to enhance the supportive environment for social entrepreneurs and INGOs collaboration. For example, we hope that funders who read this report find new inspiration and rationale to deploy their capital in service of advancing social innovation, thus enabling INGOs and social entrepreneurs to carry out their work more effectively. Similarly, we expect that intermediaries will better understand the role they can play to foster collaborations between INGOs and social entrepreneurs. Whether by supporting an incubator, funding the research and development wing of an inclusive business, or launching an innovation-focused convening with policymakers, key ecosystem actors are essential to fueling social innovation alongside INGOs.

**Finally**, and this almost goes without saying, we want this report to lead to greater impact. Innovation is not an end unto itself; its value is measured by concrete progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ultimate purpose of calling greater attention to the importance of innovation is achieving these goals.

## DEFINING OUR TERMS

Because we have aimed to make this report accessible and relevant to a broad audience, we use this brief section to clarify several of the most important terms we use throughout it.

Naturally, we begin with **social innovation**, the substantive focus of this report. We agree with the definition of innovation offered by the International Development Innovation Alliance, which defines innovation as the process of creating “new solutions with the transformative ability to accelerate impact.”<sup>8</sup> Innovation can range from the creation of new technology (e.g., a new water filtration device) to the development of novel training and education methods (e.g., raising awareness about contraception). It is worth noting that many interviewees stressed that social innovation efforts, by design, should produce systems-level change.<sup>9</sup>

Next, we define **International Non-Governmental Organizations**, or INGOs, which are organizations that are independent of government and that operate across international boundaries. INGOs may be focused on advocacy or on providing services or both, but their key distinguishing features are their transnational sphere of activity and their incorporation as non-government entities.

INGOs make up a rich and complex network of institutions working for greater social equity, environmental resilience, and democratic vitality across the world. From orchestrating vaccination campaigns to providing microfinance to smallholder farmers, these organizations are often at the vanguard of driving solutions for global social impact. In this report, we focus on the world’s largest international NGOs with annual revenues approaching or above 1 billion EUR and thousands of staff employed across dozens of countries.

A **social entrepreneur** is an individual who conceives of, and relentlessly pursues, a new idea designed to solve societal problems on a very wide scale by changing the systems that undergird those problems. Social entrepreneurs seek systemic change, defined as the fundamental reform of existing societal systems and/or the creation of new ones. They typically activate people as contributors and solution-providers in their communities.<sup>10</sup>

We use the term **intermediary** to mean organizations that build the ecosystem needed for social entrepreneurs to excel. According to the Social Innovation Forum, intermediaries support organizations in a “consultative capacity, provide critical technical assistance, offer advice and guidance, build a network of supportive funders, bring entrepreneurs and leaders together.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.idiainnovation.org/why-innovation>

<sup>9</sup> Systems innovation can be defined as “... integrated and coordinated interventions in economic, political, technological and social systems and along whole value chains” (according to the definition of EIT Climate KIC). For more on systems innovation in development see <https://www.idiainnovation.org/resources/part-one-systems-innovation>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/unlonely-planet-2022>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.socialinnovationforum.org/blog/how-can-intermediaries-accelerate-social-change>

## STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The remainder of the report proceeds as follows. In the next section, we review the core activities of INGOs and explain how these activities bear on the development and scaling of social innovation. Following that overview, we review the various challenges that INGOs face in their attempt to advance social innovation, ranging from issues of organizational culture to capacity limitations. Then, we review the core activities of social entrepreneurs as they relate to social innovation and the barriers they encounter in their partnerships with INGOs.

Next, we discuss what other ecosystem actors can do to support INGOs and social entrepreneurs in promoting social innovation. As we note in this section, social innovation is an inherently collaborative phenomenon, requiring input and participation across diverse networks of stakeholders. Each of the actors we review in this section has an important part to play in ensuring that innovative solutions to major problems are identified, refined, and scaled.

## METHODS

We studied the role of INGOs in advancing social innovation by deploying a survey and conducting 35 interviews. Twenty of these interviews involved select leaders from INGOs, bilateral donors, multilateral organizations, and philanthropic foundations. Simultaneously, we conducted case study interviews with fifteen social entrepreneurs (mostly) based in Africa, all of whom are Ashoka Fellows. There were three primary questions motivating these interviews:

- **What is the state** of social innovation within INGOs?
- **What helps** or hinders collaboration between social entrepreneurs and INGOs?
- **What are the strategies**, resources, and policies that can best support collaborations between social entrepreneurs and INGOs, and social innovation more broadly?

In some cases, we followed up with interviewees to request additional materials about examples they cited during the interviews. Some of those examples are profiled in this report.

We also distributed a survey to a group of social entrepreneurs based in Africa, all of whom are Ashoka Fellows. A total of 29 social entrepreneurs completed the survey, yielding a 20 percent response rate. Through both our interviews and the survey, we asked social entrepreneurs about what has helped or hindered their collaborations with INGO partners. We also asked about the strategies, resources, and policies that best support these collaborations. The focus on Africa arose from a multi-year collaboration between Ashoka and CARE. The goal of this collaboration was to facilitate collaborations between CARE and social entrepreneurs in East Africa. Some of these partnerships are featured in the report.

# FINDINGS ON **INGOS**

INGOs are often multidivisional and multipurpose organizations, pursuing both humanitarian (emergency response) and development priorities. In the next page we review the main functions of INGOs as they relate to the cultivation of social innovation, including case examples.

Because of similarities in the operating model (spread, size, budget, operations, work force, impact) and significance in international development, we included UN Programs, such as the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the World Food Program (WFP), in the assessment and case examples.



# WHAT INGOS DO



## THEY HIRE INNOVATIVE TALENT AND BUILD INTERNAL CAPACITY

Many INGOs are focused on building internal capacity in service of innovation. For example, one INGO leader discussed how they are working with their organization's recruiters to evaluate and hire for innovation by paying specific attention to prospective hires' appetite for failure, learning, and resilience. Several other interviewees talked about efforts to help current staff apply innovation methods and learnings in their everyday work, such as training staff on human-centered design thinking principles.

As one innovation leader states,

“

*Our goal is that innovation methods and tools will be embedded in every and each of our projects. Staff can do horizon scanning, future forecasting, sensemaking journeys or design thinking, and can go beyond the silos, creating a more collaborative approach to programming. These are the main legacies we want to leave behind.”*



## United Nations Development Program Accelerator Labs: Leveraging Innovation Skills

In 2019, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) established a global network of accelerator labs designed to rethink sustainable development for the twenty-first century. This network is made up of 91 lab teams across 115 countries. These teams are comprised of UNDP staff who were hired because of their “unusual talent.” As their website states, “72 percent of [the team] have experience in prototyping; 54 percent can work with citizen generated data; and 29 percent can perform tasks related to artificial intelligence and machine learning.” These teams leverage their innovative skillsets to experiment with new approaches to social and environmental problems. They surface insights about what does and doesn’t work and give decision-makers the tools they need to build portfolios of solutions to address complex problems. In a study UNDP Accelerator Labs co-authored with Nesta, the authors urge for greater investment in developing and strengthening innovation skills.<sup>12</sup>

### THEY ENABLE INTRAPRENEURSHIP

Intrapreneurship refers to entrepreneurial activity within an existing organization (as opposed to the creation of a new organization). Several INGOs have set up mechanisms to support intrapreneurship by enabling and empowering their staff to share and build their innovative ideas. These mechanisms include incubators and innovation funds where intrapreneurs can submit their ideas for financial and technical support. One interviewee emphasized, that when completing the application form, staff are asked to have done the research on the other social innovators doing related work, thus demonstrating that they are prioritizing partnership over ownership and avoiding needless redundancy.

Another INGO has developed systems to incentivize innovation by recognizing intrapreneurs within the organization. For example, one interviewee shared,



*For the innovation challenges we run every year, the intrapreneur will present in front of senior executives across our global organization, allowing the intrapreneur to showcase their skillsets, innovative solution, and gain financial resources to bring their solution to life.”*

<sup>12</sup> [https://smartertogether.earth/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNDP\\_CI\\_Report2\\_final\\_20210521.pdf](https://smartertogether.earth/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNDP_CI_Report2_final_20210521.pdf)

## CASE EXAMPLE

### International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Solferino Academy: Enabling Intrapreneurship



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Solferino Academy builds the capacity of the Red Cross' National Society staff and volunteers to develop and test "cutting-edge" solutions that address humanitarian issues. The intention is that these ideas will be adopted by IFRC, making it a more effective and future-ready organization. Staff and volunteers are invited to apply to the Future Fellows and Limitless programs to upskill and receive resources to develop these ideas.<sup>13</sup>

#### THEY SUPPORT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

INGOs also build the capacity of social entrepreneurs by providing technical assistance and funding. Some social entrepreneurs reported that INGOs have helped to improve their financial systems, recruited and trained personnel to run programs, and supported them with compliance and reporting. Some INGO leaders talked about providing financial support to social entrepreneurs with innovative ideas and deploying impact investments in those who already have revenue-generating non-profits or for-profits. Several mentioned that brokering partnerships between the social entrepreneurs and internal project teams must be integrated in any support program, and that they should be focused around the INGOs' strategic priorities.

Some INGOs create incubators, labs, and accelerators, for local innovators to apply to directly. One INGO leader explained,



*We have a lab, an incubator, and a fund in our hub. The emphasis of these operations is localization. We really felt strongly that, especially in Rwanda, where other folks are very entrepreneurial, people are setting up businesses that are having an impact on children. So, we invite them to apply; there's a humility in recognizing that INGOs often don't know the best way of solving problems."*

<sup>13</sup> <https://solferinoacademy.com/>



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## Save the Children's Kumwe Hub: Supporting Local Innovators

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Save the Children created the Kumwe Hub to “shake up traditional aid delivery” as one of its innovation efforts. Based in Rwanda, the Hub brings together a team of innovators to partner with changemaking businesses across Africa. Specifically, this team supports African social entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, increasing their impact, helping children to fulfil their potential. Kumwe Hub has the explicit goal of “putting power back into local hands.”

Kumwe Hub has three component parts—a lab, an incubator, and a fund—all of which provide financial, and operational resources to expand the reach of its partners. Starting with the lab, Kumwe Hub uses the lab to identify promising impact-driven businesses. Kumwe Hub partners then engages these businesses to develop their proof of concept and scale them to new locations. The incubator engages experts to provide support on business development. Save the Children brings in expertise on impact measurement and child-focused technical expertise in education, inclusion and health. Lastly, Kumwe Hub’s fund provides both grants and loans, delivered through its partner, African Entrepreneur Collective, with interest repayments far below the national average.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.kumwehub.com/>

## Plan International: Gender Lens Investing



Plan International's Gender Lens Investing program provides financial and non-financial support to businesses in Kenya that are led or owned by women, offer goods and services that benefit women and girls, increase women's employment and gender equity in the workplace, and support the role of women in the supply chain. Plan International's Gender Lens Investing program is developing four interventions which address ecosystem gaps hindering the flow of capital with a gender lens. These interventions include an incubator for early-stage gender-inclusive businesses, a gender lens investing blended finance fund offering small ticket capital to women-owned and gender-inclusive businesses, a matchmaking service to facilitate networking between investors and women entrepreneurs, and a gender lens investing resource hub.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://plan-international.org/how-we-work/gender-lens-investing/>



## THEY STRENGTHEN THE BROADER ECOSYSTEM OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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INGOs also leverage their professional networks to access funding earmarked for international development. In some instances, they then use these funds to foster the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in countries and regions. Several INGOs have extensive experience building larger consortiums across multiple countries with diverse stakeholders to foster the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Two highlighted that their INGOs do not implement the support programs themselves, instead always work with local partners to deliver the programs, and that working with local incubators and intermediaries in program delivery needs to be strengthened.

### CASE EXAMPLE

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## CARE France Inclusive Business Program: Ecosystem Collaboration

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Funded by the French Development Agency (AFD), the “AFD for Inclusive and Digital Business” program (AFIDBA) was an accelerator program created to build and sustain inclusive and digital businesses in Africa. The program was organized by multiple partners, including Bond’innov, Positive Planet International, I&P Conseil, CARE France, Orange, and the French Research Institute for Development. In partnership with local incubators, this consortium implemented AFIDBA in four countries: Burkina Faso (La Fabrique), Ghana (Innohub), Morocco (Impact Lab), and Senegal (Concree and MakeSense). A total of 61 businesses were served over the course of the program.

While AFIDBA did provide direct support to businesses, its central goal was to build an enabling environment for inclusive and digital entrepreneurship in these four countries. To this end, AFIDBA organized webinars and awareness-raising workshops for ecosystem stakeholders. They also authored a white paper to share learnings and recommendations on how to foster the ecosystem for inclusive business.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.carefrance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/resume-livre-blanc-inclusive-business-anglais.pdf>

Several interviewees see their INGO as “connectors” and “influencers”, helping to connect the actors in the innovation ecosystems, particularly with governmental institutions. As one innovation leader emphasized,



*We want to leverage our connections with government and different actors, such as UN agencies for advancing the ecosystem. And we have the power to influence government at a policy level. We are the go-to player for policy influence. When we don't have clear regulations, definitions and policies on start-ups and social enterprises, we can support government.”*

## CASE EXAMPLE

### Oxfam Impact SME Development Program: Ecosystem Development

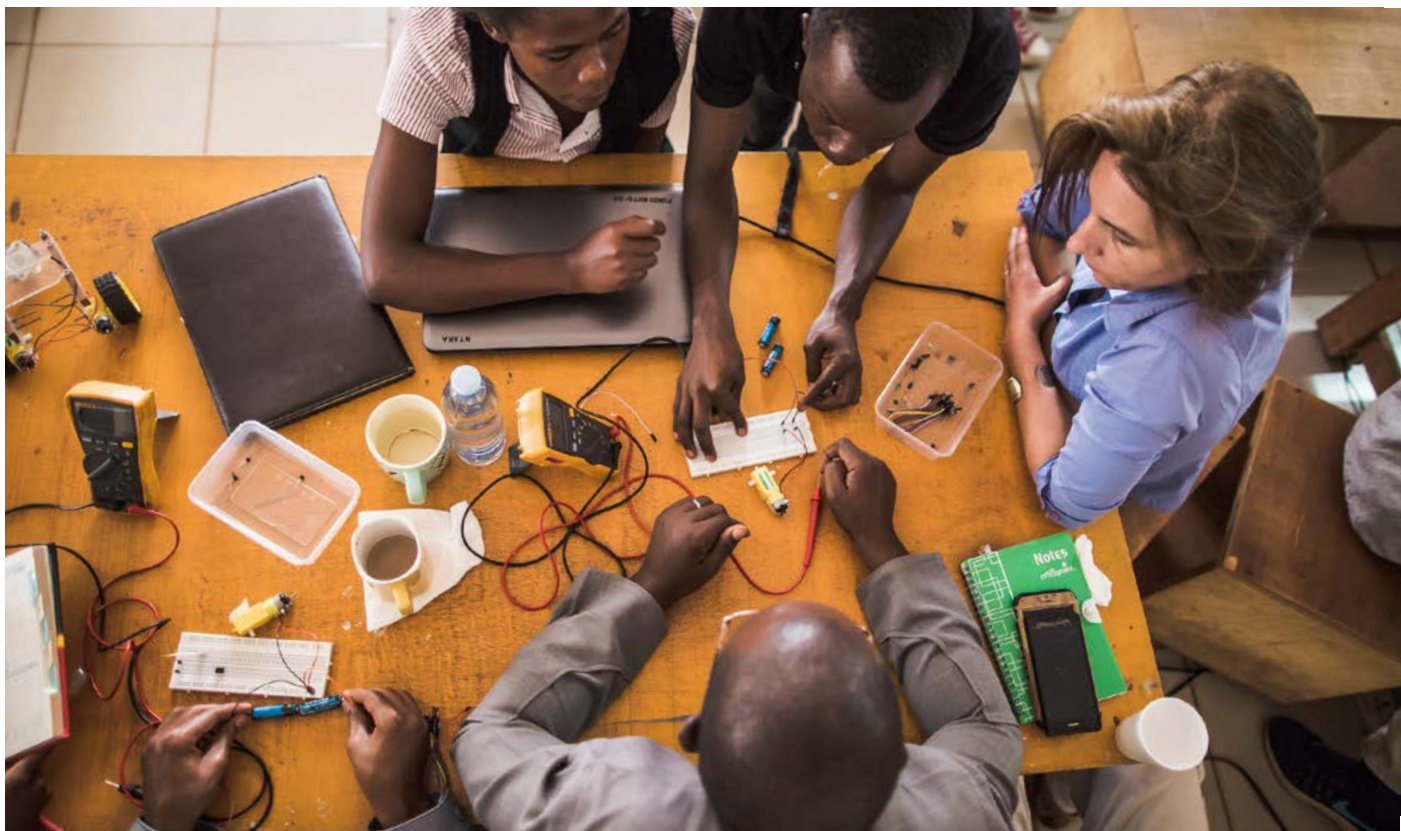


Oxfam’s Impact SME Development Program was designed to build an economy in which impact driven small and medium-sized enterprises contribute to a “fairer, greener and more inclusive ecosystem.” By providing customized business development support to enterprises based in Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, Nigeria and Cambodia, these businesses can thrive, increase their positive social and environmental impact, and strengthen the economy. Since its launch in 2015, the program has assisted more than 370 SMEs across these countries—many of which, according to SMEs impact measurement efforts, have secured additional funding and scaled significantly. The program mobilized and engaged relevant stakeholders to foster the impact economy and developed policy recommendations.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/impact-sme-development-programme>



## THEY PARTNER WITH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



Social innovation leaders within INGOs connect their colleagues to social entrepreneurs, and they connect social entrepreneurs to needed resources. They recognize that social entrepreneurs' contextual knowledge and tested products will likely far out deliver anything designed from scratch; therefore, they broker relationships between social entrepreneurs and their staff, among other social actors in the international development sector, in order to identify and capitalize on complementarities among these organizations.



*We help our project teams to bring grassroots innovations into their work. We support them to reach out to new allies, especially grassroots innovators. We announce challenges and we are headhunting solutions to apply for the challenge grant fund."*

Several interviewees talked about their intent to move away from transactional relationships with social entrepreneurs, to long-term strategic partnerships to scale impact.



*We want to move from a program delivered for social entrepreneurs to real co-creation. We want to move into external solutions and co-creations where our INGO and social entrepreneurs join forces and assets to tackle strategic development issues together".*

## CARE and VisionSpring: Scaling Solutions



VisionSpring is a social enterprise that provides affordable eyewear for people living on less than \$4/day. It also partners with non-profits, social entrepreneurs, government agencies, and corporations, providing them vision screening training and affordable eyeglasses, so these partners, too, can provide vision to the communities they serve.<sup>18</sup> This is VisionSpring's approach to scaling—partnering as opposed to growing its own footprint. One example of this is VisionSpring's partnership with CARE International's social business, Live Well, based in Zambia.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the high cost associated with distributing products to remote areas, VisionSpring struggled to scale across Zambia. Live Well, too, was facing scaling issues. Specifically, Live Well had very low profit margins on the health products sold by its network of Community Health Entrepreneurs (CHEs). When CHEs cannot turn a profit, their motivation to sell plummets, further reducing Live Well's revenue and potential to scale.

CARE US's Innovation Unit learned about these organizations' pain points and saw a partnership opportunity to solve these impasses. CARE had Live Well to leverage its reach in Zambia to solve VisionSpring's distribution challenge. This increased the earnings of Live Well's CHEs. VisionSpring's services are now available in 14 remote communities in Eastern and Luapula Provinces and four peri-urban areas of Lusaka Province. To date, 2,400 eye exams have been conducted, yielding 1,224 presbyopia diagnoses and 447 sales (37% sales conversion rate). Live Well's margin has increased from 9% to 33%, significantly increasing CHEs profits and the viability of Live Well business model.

<sup>18</sup> <https://visionspring.org/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://livewellzambia.com>



## World Food Program Innovation Accelerator and Sanku: Scaling Solutions



Sanku is a social enterprise devoted to ending malnutrition in Africa; it is one of the social enterprises that benefited from the support of the World Food Programs' (WFP) Innovation Accelerator.<sup>20</sup> Sanku's advanced and cost-effective technology and unit economics-based supply chain interventions help add nutrients to milled flour and offsets the cost of those nutrients for millers. It offers fortified milled products at no additional cost.<sup>21</sup> Wanting to increase the penetration of this technology to Tanzania, Sanku applied for grant funding from the WFP Innovation Accelerator. The funding allowed Sanku to expand to an additional 147 small-scale mills. The accelerator also provided business strategy support and connected Sanku to other potential scaling partners to scale to countries with similar nutritional profile as Tanzania. WFP Innovation Accelerator and Sanku's partnership presented the opportunity to leverage their respective capabilities, ultimately allowing both organizations to take important steps toward ending malnutrition.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> <https://innovation.wfp.org>

<sup>21</sup> <https://projectthehealthychildren.org/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://innovation.wfp.org/project/sanku>

# BARRIERS THAT INGOS FACE

Our interviews surfaced several important barriers that INGOs encounter when working to advance social innovation. Here we review and detail each of these barriers.

## **RIGID ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

Of all the barriers they emphasized, INGO leaders, funders, social entrepreneurs, and intermediaries most often named INGOs' organizational culture as the most significant barrier to innovation. INGOs are often large organizations that have been operating for many years and that have developed tightly regulated operating systems and procedures over time. Although these organizations have much to show for their years of activity, they often do not exhibit the nimble and flexible organizational culture of start-ups. INGOs are widely recognized as relatively risk-averse and bureaucratic entities, often itself a consequence of strict donor requirements. To be clear, these qualities may be conducive to achieving significant direct impact through proven intervention models; however, they are less conducive to innovation and systems change.

Several interviewees reported that staff are disposed to maintain the status quo in how they run their operations and in how they identify partners with whom to collaborate. The extra commitment of time and resources that tends to come with getting up to speed on issues related to social innovation can be a hurdle for some. Furthermore, one participant said that money disincentivizes innovation, as staff do not want to take on experimental projects because of the risk to their organizational reputation and pay if these projects fail. Social entrepreneurs too agree that INGOs could use greater risk tolerance, most often selecting it as their biggest area for improvement of the thirteen areas listed in our survey (52%).

Another INGO leader noted that staff are satisfied with "initiatives that are supported for visibility's sake over a short period of time, with a bunch of gizmos and gadgets." Knowing that one public relation faux pas can lead to dollars lost or reputational damage, communications staff prioritize publishing positive, easy-to-measure impact metrics, and will only agree to publish something new or innovative if there is an abundance of evidence to demonstrate impact. Consequently, rather than attempting to capture true indicators of innovation, INGO staff may opt to "play it safe" by capturing data on service volume (i.e., outputs) and other traditional metrics.



## STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

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Although we found that several of our interviewees reported interest among their colleagues in exploring and advancing social innovation, we also found that there was a lack of consensus on how best to accomplish that objective. This lack of clear direction on how best to pursue social innovation can undermine action. As one respondent explained,



*There's a lack of clarity on the rationale and the purpose of innovation and what's the role of different staff members and functions to pursue that mission."*

As one leader noted, this barrier forces innovation to occur in isolation rather than in orchestration with larger initiatives. Without a clear sense of...

1. **Why** innovation is a worthwhile impact goal,
2. **What** kind of innovation an INGO aims to support, and
3. **How** specifically the organization will provide such support,

... ideas are unlikely to evolve into concrete plans for action. Even if intrapreneurs are able to operationalize their ideas, they will often fail to sustain and grow the resulting enterprises without strategic anchoring. Without embedding innovation in the organizational strategy, it will always be vulnerable to the backburner.

## INADEQUATE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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Inadequate infrastructure and capacity are limiting the potential of current social innovation efforts. Many INGOs' social innovation departments are reliant on project-based restricted funds, as opposed to regular overhead funding, flexible funding. Project-based funding has been a longstanding financial model for social sector work. While this model may be effective for tightly scoped initiatives with clear objectives and relatively straightforward timelines, it is ill-suited to the more ambitious but ambiguous parameters of social innovation for sustainable social change.

Additionally, decentralized funding prevents INGO staff from integrating social innovation into their everyday business practices and perpetuates the mindset that innovation is ancillary to core strategy. Even when innovation projects are successful, staff do not have a way to share learnings, leading colleagues to waste time "reinventing the wheel." In sum, when short-term, project-based funding ends, so does innovation. INGO leaders also spoke to us about the challenges they face developing partnerships with social innovators. Some said this was a matter of infrastructure, as they do not have the funds or tools to "source" social innovators, leading them to resort to personal networks to find the right partner.

Likewise, several innovation leaders emphasized that they do not have dedicated points of contact to that would help social entrepreneurs navigate their organizations. As one said,



*There are no dedicated staff members in country offices that could function as entry points for external social innovators. There is no one to help them navigate our complexity, nor to support us to evaluate and process the opportunity.”*

Others reported that this is a problem of expertise. Without familiarity with human-centered design thinking, among other tools, staff are not confident they are partnering with the right innovator to solve the right problem and are without a roadmap to co-create impactful partnerships.

## **DISCONNECTED FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

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To strengthen its innovation practices internally, participants know that their organizations need to understand and work with the larger ecosystem of social actors. This type of interorganizational cross-pollination is critical to generating meaningful, impactful innovation. Yet, multiple INGO leaders whom we interviewed reported that staff struggle to stay up to speed even with internal developments at their own organization or the workload on their plates, leaving little time to attend to the broader field. As one interviewee put it:



*Most of our teams are focusing 90% of their time to implement current projects. So, there is limited time of colleagues to think into the future and outside the box.”*

Like social entrepreneurs, INGO staff need points of contact. Some of our interviewees shared that they have trouble connecting with other actors because they don't know whom to contact. Some are without the skill and resources to identify and connect with relevant external organizations (e.g., through network and systems analysis, crowdsourcing, and open innovation techniques). However, even if organizations are well-connected, funding may still stand as a barrier to greater connection. INGOs are often competing for the same dollars, a situation that disincentivizes collaboration. One INGO leader even told us of a time when she realized her organization and another INGO were doing the same work:



*... I was talking to another INGO and said, 'we're doing the same work.' We're not collaborating across the INGOs, because there is no financial incentive to do so. In fact, there is a disincentive to collaborate together as innovation results are seen as intellectual property providing us with a competitive edge with funders. Therefore, people are quite reluctant, especially our fundraising teams, to fundraise together.”*

## LACK OF CLARITY ABOUT ECOSYSTEM ROLES

When asked about the ecosystem's role in advancing social innovation in development, INGO leaders explained that a lack of shared purpose can be a barrier. One participant simply said: "...there's a lack of clarity, what is the rationale and the purposes of innovation and what's the role of different staff members and the functions to pursue that mission?" Another said,



*I would argue that, among probably the majority of those that engage in innovation, if you were to ask either, you know, the head of agency or even the innovation leader, 'What's your narrative around innovation, what is the main purpose?' they would be hard pressed. They will have to think a minute about it and then give you an answer that is probably not widely shared, understood, embraced by the majority of staff."*

Even if there were an explicit shared purpose (e.g., to support social entrepreneurship), organizations would still need a clear understanding of their specific role in realizing that purpose and a mechanism through which to hold themselves accountable. The ecosystem currently lacks this clarity.



*We weren't sure what our role was supposed to be in the ecosystem related to social entrepreneurship. We weren't sure what we were supposed to be really good at. Were we supposed to be really good at creating entities and spinning them out? Were we supposed to be really good at just supporting local social entrepreneurs kind of invisibly through the way that we executed our work in communities? Were we supposed to be like another potential funding source? Right, where we could add value by vetting—should we build up a fund of our own and invest? Because we had grown up doing direct development interventions, and that was what we were built for, and it's what we were good at. It was the expertise we had in house. So, I think that was the biggest thing we struggled with—trying to really get clear on like, what's our role? And why is it our role? And how do we have authority to say that that's the case?"*

# FINDINGS ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

Social entrepreneurs are individuals who conceive of, and relentlessly pursue, a new idea designed to solve societal problems on a wide scale, ideally, by changing the systems that undergird the problems. Below we review key assets social entrepreneurs bring to the table for collaborations with INGOs, including case examples.



# WHAT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS DO

## THEY PROVIDE EXPERTISE

Whether in relation to a novel technology, to the cultural nuances of a specific community or financial sustainability, social entrepreneurs offer expertise in areas that INGOs may be unfamiliar with. Social entrepreneurs have an unmatched expertise on the local contexts in which they work. This, as highlighted in this report multiple times, is considered one of the strongest attributes of partnering with social entrepreneurs.

When asked to indicate what they see as greatest collaboration opportunities with INGO, many social entrepreneurs we surveyed emphasized the potential of fusing know-how and co-creating programs with INGOs to better serve their organization's target population (43%, second ranked). 39% of social entrepreneurs' surveys referred to joint fundraising and increased revenues as an associated opportunity (ranked third and fourth). 19% of respondents mentioned that they have served as a consultant to INGOs on their areas of expertise in the past.

## CASE EXAMPLE

### Oluseun Onigbinde, Co-Founder, BudgIT, Nigeria



BudgIT is a Nigerian-based civic organization that uses technology to simplify information about public spending, serving its primary goal of increasing government transparency and accountability.<sup>23</sup> BudgIT has partnered with an INGO over the past decade to work toward their shared goal of increasing the transparency of government data and budgets. Throughout this partnership, BudgIT has benefited from its INGO's funding support and organizational development expertise. BudgIT's INGO partner could take advantage of BudgIT's deep knowledge and its technology to democratize public data. Indeed, BudgIT has provided its tools to visualize public data in engaging ways that has sparked civic discussion and institutional reform. According to Oluseun, such collaborations can be catalysts for mutual knowledge transfer that is of enormous benefit to both INGOs and social entrepreneurs.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/oluseun-onigbinde>

## THEY PROVIDE SOLUTIONS

Social entrepreneurs create innovative solutions to address seemingly intractable problems—problems that INGOs, too, seek to address. When an INGO is looking to serve a target population, social entrepreneurs step in with their tried-and-true solutions. Sometimes this takes the form of a grantor-grantee relationships. While this structure is not without its disadvantages, the funds then allow the social entrepreneur to provide solutions to both the INGO and the individuals they are serving. In other (ideal) scenarios, social entrepreneurs and INGOs are partners in the true sense of the word. In this case, the social entrepreneur and INGO partner to deliver the social entrepreneur’s solution.

When asked to indicate what they see as greatest collaboration opportunities with INGO, most social entrepreneurs we surveyed pointed to the potential of building partnerships with INGOs to scale their solutions for greater impact (57%, ranked first). 13% of social entrepreneurs surveyed mentioned that they have collaborated with an INGO to adopt their solution or program in the past.

### CASE EXAMPLE

#### Abu Musuuza, Co-Founder, FLIP Africa, Uganda

FLIP is a job platform that connects unemployed and underemployed young people to short-term job opportunities in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Africa.<sup>24</sup> This service provides young people with the opportunity to earn money and build a professional identity, all while reducing the cost and time it takes MSMEs to find the personnel they need to grow their businesses.

CARE International in Uganda encountered FLIP’s platform and approached them about a possible partnership to address CARE’s training needs on digital literacy for the role out of the Chomoka platform<sup>25</sup> for Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA). Abu described this partnership, highlighting the ways in which FLIP served as a solution-provider:



*CARE Uganda works with community-based trainers in rural areas to ensure the uptake of CARE’s digital platform Chomoka, which makes it easy for VSLA’s to track their finances and increase recordkeeping transparency. We saw this as an opportunity to provide more jobs to youth signed up on our digital platform. They trained the community-based trainers on digital literacy and the Chomoka platform. The purpose of the training was to build the capacity and the knowledge of the users on the Chomoka application and improve the digital literacy levels of the community-based trainers. We plan to continue this partnership with CARE to ensure that women savings groups have the support they need to use CARE’s digital platforms and the ability to manage their finances. Ultimately CARE will be able to deliver quality trainings to their local partners.”*

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.flipafrica.app/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.chomoka.org>



## CASE EXAMPLE

### Regina Honu, Founder, Soronko Academy, Ghana



Soronko Academy's mission is to help young people, with a special focus on women and girls, to realize their economic potential, gain the skills they need to secure fulfilling jobs, and overcome the gender gap in technology.<sup>26</sup> It runs the first human-centered coding and design school for children and young adults in West Africa. An INGO learned about Regina Honu's influential work and invited her to partner on a project that aligned with the Academy's mission.<sup>27</sup> Through the partnership, Regina was able to scale Soronko's programs to the INGO's target populations, which included very remote regions she had never accessed before.

It takes a lot for these collaborations to be successful, but the factor of utmost importance, according to Regina, is mission alignment between partners. Once this key commonality is confirmed, these collaborations are with a North Star and clearly value-add for both parties.

<sup>26</sup> <https://soronkoacademy.com>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/regina-agyare>

## CASE EXAMPLE

### Ilya Yacevich, Founder, Global Trauma Project, Kenya



Global Trauma Project (GTP) works to break cycles of intergenerational trauma, violence and abuse, by training and supporting grassroots caregivers in “hard-to-reach” locations where supports are lacking.<sup>28</sup> Since their inception in 2013, GTP has worked with a number of INGO partners to strengthen localized, trauma-informed initiatives in Eastern Africa working towards reducing gender-based, family, and community violence, through an innovative Fellowship Certification Program. Recently, GTP has been collaborating with CARE Mozambique, on developing healing initiatives that are culturally-relevant and appropriate for highly volatile and transient settings of internal displacement.

The partnership is enabling CARE Mozambique to learn about integrating an innovative, evidence-based method for delivering quality psychosocial support in a conflict-affected setting, where people are drastically impacted by multiple layers of violence and stress.

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*The partnership has also offered GTP an opportunity to contextualize our model within a highly challenging environment, where there is active conflict and instability. We know that emotional and psychological wellbeing are critical for healthy development and functioning, yet we face on-going challenges with ensuring quality support is safe, accessible and relevant. CARE has been a wonderful collaborator to work with us on addressing these challenges, as we work alongside their existing Village Savings and Loan structures for strengthening psychosocial support in areas of displacement.”<sup>29</sup>*

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.globaltraumaproject.com/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/ilya-yacevich>



## THEY EXPERIMENT AND LEARN

Social entrepreneurs' mindsets and organizational structures (e.g., start-up) allow them to operate their organizations as quasi-laboratories. They are constantly experimenting, iterating, and optimizing. This openness and responsiveness to learning reduces the amount of time from idea to viable product or solution. This process elicits trust from their partners, who can have confidence that the solution has been vetted and in turn "de-risked," as one of our social innovation leaders put it. Social entrepreneurs' commitment to experimentation is a key asset for INGOs.

35% of social entrepreneurs included in our survey see a major collaboration opportunity in supporting INGOs to become more innovative, iterative, and entrepreneurial. In turn, also 35% of respondents see that partnerships with INGOs will help them to gain more public recognition of and demand for their work, leading to an increase in impact (ranked fifth).

## CASE EXAMPLE

### Alexandra Machado, Founder, Girl MOVE Academy, Mozambique



Girl MOVE is a grassroots leadership academy that uses mentorship to improve young girls' school retention and ultimately, to advance gender equality.<sup>30</sup> Together with an INGO partner, Girl MOVE is implementing its model in new regions. The INGO is identifying and recruiting women and girls in rural communities to serve as mentors. This partnership allows the INGO to use a tried-and-true model to meet one of its goals, i.e., advancing gender equality. For Girl MOVE, this collaboration has expanded its reach and confirmed that its methodology can be effective in new contexts. Alexandra Machado aptly summed up this partnership by quoting, "Alone, we may go faster, but together, we go further."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.girlmove.org/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/alexandra-machado>

## CASE EXAMPLE

### Priscilla M. Achakpa, Founder, Women Environmental Program, Nigeria



The Women Environmental Program (WEP) empowers women and young people to address environmental, economic, and political issues that affect them, with the overall goal of promoting a sustainable society by combating gender injustice.<sup>32</sup> Several years ago, WEP and its INGO partner drafted a joint proposal, which was later won by the INGO. The resulting funds were then granted to WEP and the collaboration began. Priscilla Achakpa, WEP's founder, attributes the success of this collaboration to transparency and the distinct contributions each partner makes to their work.<sup>33</sup> WEP contributes skills that help its INGO partner to specify and contextualize advocacy issues at the community-level. In addition to funding, WEP benefited from the INGOs' contacts at the national level, and the networking opportunities its INGO partner provided, which they otherwise wouldn't have had access. In addition to funding, WEP gained new contacts from introductions facilitated by its INGO partner. The benefits of this partnership are, indeed, bidirectional.

<sup>32</sup> <https://wepnigeria.net>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/priscilla-mbarumun-achakpa>



# BARRIERS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS FACE

Our interviews surfaced several important barriers that social entrepreneurs experience when embarking on collaborations with INGOs. Here we review the most important barriers identified.

## **LACK OF TIME TO DEVOTE TO UNDERSTANDING INGOs**

When asked to indicate what they could do to make their collaborations with INGOs more successful, over a third of social entrepreneurs (35%) said that developing a better understanding of how INGOs could support them would be of great benefit. However, many of the social entrepreneurs we spoke with shared that they do not have sufficient time to work with INGOs. This lack of time is understandable given the demands and constraints of running an organization, particular in developing and often conflict-ridden regions. Unfortunately, the inability of many social entrepreneurs to dedicate much time to working with INGOs translates to a lack of understanding of how these organizations operate – how they make decisions, how they staff projects, etc. Thus, social entrepreneurs are missing out on valuable information that would help them to understand how to best maximize these potentially valuable partnerships.

## **STRICT OPERATIONS OF INGOs**

Social entrepreneurs partnered with INGOs said that they struggle to navigate the large system and bureaucracy of INGOs. There often is neither a designated point of contact to guide the innovator, nor standard guidelines regarding important issues such as data-sharing and compliance. With the tightly regulated operating systems and procedures of INGOs comes inflexibility. One social entrepreneur we interviewed told us that their INGO partner's financial rules have limited the potential of their collaboration. A case in point is an INGO that had granted her funds but prohibited the use of those funds for personnel expenditures. Because her greatest need was her ability to compensate her team while building a new program delivery model, the INGO's restriction posed a serious obstacle to progress. A lack of flexibility and adaptability on the part of the INGO clearly hindered innovation in this case.



*The greatest barrier to collaborating with INGOs is the amount of bureaucracy in reports... there is a square way of doing things that holds us back from acting faster."*

## NON-INCLUSIVE DESIGN PROCESSES



INGOs often have a weak understanding of how social entrepreneurs operate and, most importantly, what they bring to the table as partners. Often, INGOs don't consider what social entrepreneurs have done on the ground before their arrival at a new location. The social entrepreneurs we interviewed told us that their INGO partners frequently predetermine the role that social entrepreneurs play rather than take the time to understand each social entrepreneur's unique strengths, challenges, and background.

For example, we heard of one INGO that offered an already-decided sum of money to deliver a specific service without first consulting their social entrepreneur partner on the amount and type of funding that would be most beneficial. As one social entrepreneur we interviewed put it:



*We don't get carried along in the [program design] process."*

In short, failing to treat social entrepreneurs as equal partners leads to poor planning and, in turn, to less impactful partnerships. The ultimate result is an erosion of trust amongst actors who ought to be forming robust and durable partnerships to benefit the stakeholders they share in common.

## DIFFERENCES IN (INNOVATION) APPROACH

After 40 years of working with social entrepreneurs, Ashoka has observed that social entrepreneurs focus on a solution until it has been broadly adopted at the national or even international scale. This approach is at odds with the more time-limited approach commonly found among INGOs and the aid sector writ large.

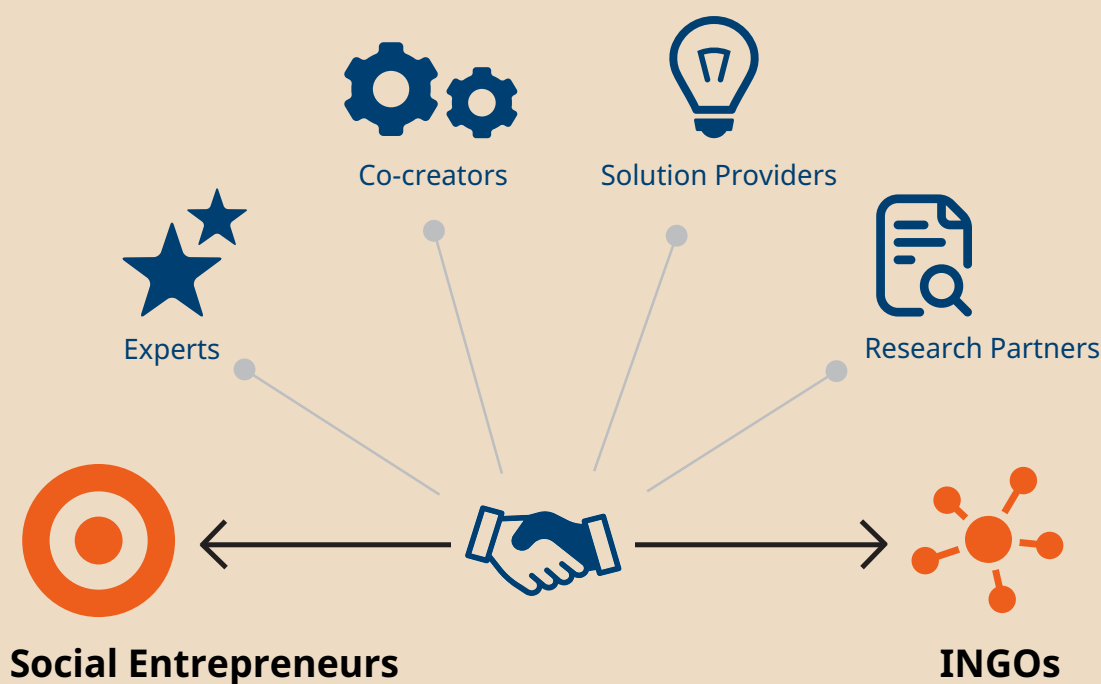


When asked to reflect on what INGOs could improve to make their collaborations with social entrepreneurs more successful, many social entrepreneurs we surveyed called out the way in which INGOs approach innovation. For example, 35% of respondents highlighted the need for a “greater focus on systems-change” among INGOs—i.e., addressing not only the symptoms but also the root causes of a social problem. Similarly, 35% of social entrepreneurs included in our survey expressed a desire for INGOs to develop stronger expertise in human-centered approaches. Most often, social entrepreneurs reported that their collaborations would be more successful if INGOs “better recognized the value of grassroots solutions” (58%) – i.e., relying on community-based organizations to identify the problems they view as most pressing and formulating home-grown solutions to those problems. Taken together, these findings shine a light on the different ways in which INGOs and social entrepreneurs approach innovation and, more importantly, the value to be realized in more consistently establishing meaningful partnerships between these two groups of actors.

Additionally, several social entrepreneurs we interviewed made clear that INGOs’ commitments to solving a specific social problem feels too time-limited. One social entrepreneur noted that it is typical for INGOs to work according to short-term grant cycles (e.g., 5-years), moving to new focuses with each cycle. This cadence leaves little opportunity for sustainable change. Other interviewees brought up INGOs’ wide-ranging focus, which undermines the focused attention that is often required to seriously tackle complex social problems.

# WHAT KEY ACTORS CAN DO

While this report has largely focused on INGOs and social entrepreneurs, every ecosystem actor has a role to play in addressing the barriers detailed above and in advancing social innovation. Our interviews surfaced several recommendations for INGOs, intermediaries, social entrepreneurs, and funders. Some of the actions we recommend are new, and others already occurring and worthy of reinforcement.





# WHAT INGOS CAN DO

## TREAT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS AS PARTNERS

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In this report alone, we have seen examples of social entrepreneurs as participants of support programs, service providers, expert advisors, co-creators, and scaling, program, and research partners. Below we summarize the main roles social entrepreneurs can play. No matter the form collaborations take, INGOs should always engage social entrepreneurs as partners in the true sense of the word.

**As experts:** Social entrepreneurs can provide valuable services to INGOs as contracted partners. They come with deep knowledge about local communities, specific sectors or novel technologies; on how to build social ventures, or how to create open and locally led organizational models that enable everyone to contribute to development. As experts, social entrepreneurs can make valuable partners to consult when specialized knowledge is needed.

**As solution providers:** Through challenges, open innovation calls, crowdsourcing, and solution mappings, INGOs can engage social entrepreneurs in problem-solving. Social entrepreneurs can then adapt, replicate, and scale their solution in partnership with INGOs.

**As co-creators:** Because of their lived experiences and inclination toward innovation, social entrepreneurs are especially valuable thought partners during the ideation stage of a program's development. INGOs should invite social entrepreneurs to "co-create" during the design phase and support them to join complex funding consortiums as equal partners to drive collective impact and access international aid.

**As research partners:** Before launching a program, INGOs often invest in researching the problems that they aim to address. This research may involve quantitative analyses of public data, the administration of surveys, or qualitative interviews with stakeholders. Because they are typically embedded in the regions in which INGOs plan to operate, social entrepreneurs can make valuable research partners – e.g., by identifying interviewees and survey respondents or by sharing primary data from their own experiences and operations.



## MAKE SOCIAL INNOVATION A STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Innovation is not yet a strategic priority for many of the INGOs discussed in this report. While their actions are trending in the right direction, to make progress that outpaces solutions, INGOs must be all-in. Our interviewees said that if leadership makes clear that innovation is a strategic priority, staff will follow suit.



*The innovation agenda must be endorsed by the CEO and by the Heads of the regions. Ideally, innovation has a direct line to the CEO and is institutionally anchored in top management."*

Leadership needs to make its commitment to innovation unequivocal. It isn't enough to simply announce it; it needs to be reinforced by the organization's operations. As a first step, leadership could convene a series of strategy discussions involving staff members and other key stakeholders to increase buy-in. Once this broader team has drawn the throughline between its organization's activities and innovation, communications should update public-facing statements, including mission and vision statements.

The leadership team can also communicate innovation's strategic value through its resource allocation. It should devote funds to build the infrastructure of its own innovation department, including proper staffing and supplies. Further, it should require fundraising teams to support the sustainability and growth of the department. As we mention in this report, because of the relatively few grant opportunities, innovation is not a priority for fundraisers. However, if leadership names innovation as a must-have, clearly articulates its strategic value, and adjusts performance metrics accordingly, fundraisers must recalibrate.

While we recommend developing an integrated and organization-wide social innovation strategy, its implementation may vary by region and require experimenting.



*We do have an overall strategy, but each region develops a strategy how they fit into the strategy, and then every country develops a strategy how to connect with the regional strategy. This process leads countries to identify their innovation value proposition. And this takes the context into account."*

In summary, if leadership puts a strategic stake in the ground, INGOs will break patterns of following the path of least resistance. INGOs will be changemakers.

## BUILD AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Having outlined how organizational culture can be a stumbling block to advancing social innovation, we now turn our attention to how INGOs can effectively address this challenge.

It begins with staff mindset, which plays a major role in how organizations conduct themselves and what teams and divisions take for granted. As one interviewee explained, “We need to bring the staff in INGOs towards that mindset of entrepreneurs, so we need more flexibility.” Achieving that shift in mindset may require the perspective and guidance of an outside consultant, or it may require an internally driven revision of how an organization does things – who sits at the table when decisions are made, the priorities and criteria against which possible courses of action are evaluated, etc. As explained in a Bond report on innovation for NGOs, organizations can encourage a culture of innovation “by promoting openness within and beyond the organization, looking for opportunities to remove silos, maintain an outward focus through regular horizon scanning, and actively exploring connections with unusual suspects outside the NGO sector.”<sup>34</sup>

The goal is to build what Nidhi Sahni and co-authors call a “curious culture,” one “where staff look beyond their day-to-day obligations, question assumptions, and constructively challenge each other’s thinking as well as the status quo.”<sup>35</sup> The same authors point out that “catalytic leadership”—leadership that empowers staff to solve problems that matter—is another core component of an organizational culture built for innovation. This is what Ashoka calls “changemaking leadership,” and it’s modeled by thousands of our Ashoka Fellows. This style of leadership encourages others to step into their power and contribute to social change, to build open and fluid organizations, and to work as a collective to bring about change.<sup>36</sup>

We recommend that INGOs devote resources to providing learning journeys that foster these mindsets. Social entrepreneurs should contribute to these learning spaces by talking about how they honed their leadership style and attesting to the impact it has had on their networks. Employees also need sufficient time and space to embark on experimental learning – such as working onside with social entrepreneurs or engaging in cross-mentoring programs. Social entrepreneurship can be built into existing development and learning offers, HR policies and practices.



*We are also setting up an intrapreneurship program, a combination of individual leadership and transformative action. The focus is on building a failure culture, a culture of collaboration and to learn how to turn ideas into action across teams and together with external organizations.”*

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/introduction-to-social-innovation-0416.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/is\\_your\\_nonprofit\\_built\\_for\\_sustained\\_innovation](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/is_your_nonprofit_built_for_sustained_innovation)

<sup>36</sup> [https://fellowship-europe.ashoka.org/sites/fellowship-europe/files/202111/Supporting%20System%20Changers\\_Final\\_Page.pdf](https://fellowship-europe.ashoka.org/sites/fellowship-europe/files/202111/Supporting%20System%20Changers_Final_Page.pdf)

## REFLECT ON “POWER FOOTPRINT”

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Many of the social entrepreneurs we interviewed urged INGOs to aggressively work to decolonize aid organizations, and as a half-measure, work to improve their own organizations diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and everyday practices. Building a diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization requires all, especially those who hold the most power, to continuously mitigate bias and redistribute power. These efforts must be monitored to hold all staff accountable.<sup>37</sup>

Some actors are developing new initiatives to support the international development sector, including INGOs, assess their “power footprint.”<sup>38</sup> Many of these initiatives operate under the premise that with every step that they take, INGOs should be reducing their power footprint and transferring power to local actors.

**Through these initiatives, INGOs are directed to answer questions like:**

1. “Are our country offices independent and locally led?”
2. “Is our organization ceding market share?”
3. “Do we have a clear endgame or exit strategy?”
4. “What percent of our funds directly channeled to local organizations?”
5. “Do we create the conditions for our local partners to lead change?”

Answering these questions is just the first step toward creating a more equitable and effective international development sector.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/ashokas-dei-initiative>

<sup>38</sup> <https://blog.werobotics.org/2022/09/28/power-footprint-project>

# WHAT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS CAN DO



## CONTINUE TO TAKE THE LEAD IN EXPERIMENTING AND TESTING SOLUTIONS

When asked about the value proposition of partnering with social entrepreneurs, multiple INGO leaders talked about social entrepreneurs' ability to iterate and to do so at greater speed than most INGOs can manage. This cycle allows the social entrepreneur not only to bring a solution to market more quickly than an INGO but also to continuously learn, resulting in more effective solutions. To sum up what one INGO leader said: Social entrepreneurs are just better at innovating. One INGO leader admitted this without any hesitation when saying,

“

*The value proposition is social entrepreneurs' ability to innovate; our organization is big and slow at innovating. It's something we don't do well, and social entrepreneurs are really good at it. They have the right leaders and mindsets and agility to innovate well, and so how can we bring those innovations into our work and scale them without necessarily having to own them? We should see social entrepreneurs as partners and let them work in a much more agile environment, which the startup ecosystem enables.”*

## **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS WITH INGOS**

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Multiple interviewees, including funders and INGO leaders, saw the opportunity for social entrepreneurs to access and introduce INGOs to new networks. At the simplest level, startups have access to funding opportunities that INGOs do not. Another interviewee discussed how social entrepreneurs have the potential to pursue support from non-traditional funders such as businesses and investors. In turn, INGOs influence and access the global aid system, which can result in additional funding for social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs and INGOs have an opportunity to join forces to decolonize and localize aid. In fact, social entrepreneurs are well positioned to hold INGOs accountable for their commitments made in international forums within various local contexts.<sup>39</sup>

## **LEVERAGE EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL CONTEXT**

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Interviewees were unanimous in their view that social entrepreneurs' knowledge of local context is the strongest asset they bring to partnerships. Social entrepreneurs often have strong ties to the communities they aim to serve, and such local knowledge can be an important resource for INGOs that are looking to scale up their impact but want to avoid "one size fits all" approaches. With knowledge of local context, social entrepreneurs can make effective partners for INGOs by introducing them to key community leaders and sharing valuable insight and perspective on the unique challenges that different communities face.

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<sup>39</sup> see e.g., <https://pledgeforchange2030.org>

# WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

## PROVIDE MORE DIRECT FUNDING FOR INNOVATION

At the most basic level, funders can provide more financial support for social innovation, particularly when it comes to INGO-social entrepreneur collaborations. The most valuable type of monetary support that funders can provide is flexible funding, which allows grantees to allocate the money as they see fit rather than being compelled to spend the money on particular project-related costs. Project-specific funding often leads grantees to underinvest in personnel and infrastructure, which are vital to well-run organizations.



*We're really good at having donors give us money for actual innovations, but what we haven't really gotten donors excited about is funding the infrastructure needed for innovation. I would love it if donors really wanted to go on that journey with us."*

Without these key ingredients, both INGOs and social entrepreneurs feel that their potential is limited. One way funders can resolve this issue is by giving more planning grants, as opposed to project grants. This insight became clear as one INGO leader expressed their desire to engage social entrepreneurs in both a smart and strategic way but said that without resources to engage in serious planning, this desire has not led to concrete action.

Funders should also consider sustaining innovation by funding overhead. As an example, one INGO has started to include a 10% line-item for innovation for donations above a specific (large) dollar amount. Many innovation departments are small in size and are responsible for raising their entire budgets, which makes it challenging to design and execute on the work, let alone scale it. Even when innovation departments receive support from dedicated fundraising teams, securing innovation grants is often not prioritized, as funding for innovation tends to be small compared to other types of grants. One simple way to resolve this tension is for funders to agree to providing regular institutional support in the form of overhead funding.



*One of the things that we struggle with is being able to quickly react to opportunities that might be even small. Sometimes if it's too small, fundraisers won't even entertain it because they are used to working on double-digit million grants. A couple million may seem like a lot to me, but for them, it's not. Funding innovation is quite hard, because usually the money that's available is not that much, and for fundraisers, especially without it being an organizational priority, we can't move on it."*



## INNOVATE ON OPERATIONS FUNDING MODELS

Interviewees called for altering traditional funding models and made three recommendations for how funders could do this. First, they recommended that funders consider implementing impact-linked financing, which involves the contingency that recipients achieve impact-related benchmarks such as systemic change and innovation.<sup>40</sup> Under this arrangement, both benchmarks and incentives for reaching those benchmarks are predetermined by all stakeholders, thus ensuring that each participant can voice their preferences, concerns, and aspirations. There are several benefits to this model, among them being its focus on outcomes (vs. outputs) and normalizing impact as a measure of performance.

Second, interviewees shared that they would benefit from more open opportunities for and better access to concessional funding. Although some funders make below-market-rate loans, particularly to “high-risk” projects, they often do so to borrowers with whom they already have relationships. More transparency around who is willing to give concessional funds and how to be considered would be of great benefit to INGOs and social entrepreneurs pursuing high-risk, high-reward ideas.

Third, interviewees recommended that funders thoroughly assess the needs of social entrepreneurs and adjust funding mechanisms to meet these needs. For example, one interviewee offered the following advice:



*Create opportunities for local social innovators to share what they are learning and what they need to solve a problem, and have donors use that information to understand the implications for funding, their risk tolerance, and mindset.” Thus, needs and experiences of local organizations should be the cornerstone to innovate development funding. Building a direct link between international funders and local organizations is one of the key challenges to master. INGOs could act as guarantors for international funders, supporting local social entrepreneurs to meet the funders criteria and to qualify for larger grants over time to scale impact.<sup>41</sup>*

## INCENTIVIZE PARTNERSHIP, INNOVATION, AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Incentivizing INGO-social entrepreneur collaboration is one promising path for increasing these powerful partnerships. One interviewee recognized the reality that the social sector, even with its mission-driven nature, operates on financial incentives. Accordingly, it is necessary to develop requests for proposals that require partnership with local social entrepreneurs. Incentivizing such partnership not only produces a direct increase in the number of partnerships but also whets the INGO’s appetite for this type of collaboration. Further, this approach to making requests for proposals unequivocally communicates the

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.roots-of-impact.org/impact-linked-finance>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/new-model-for-funding-social-enterprise-think-local/>

value the funding community places on social entrepreneurs and their ability to deliver meaningful change.

Moreover, funders need to go beyond investing in ideation and small-scale experimentation. Many interviewees emphasized that social innovation efforts should produce systems-level change. Institutionalizing social innovations across an entire system (via policies, industry standards or culture change) requires funders to be prepared for long-term engagement, creating separate – but connected – funding windows that enable collaborations to move from prototyping (e.g., in one community), to testing in larger structures (e.g., on a municipal level), to institutionalization (e.g., at national level). This again requires long-term, flexible funding.<sup>42</sup>

## FOSTER EXPERIMENTATION AND LEARNING

The social sector will not make substantial progress toward promoting innovation without making the requisite changes to current practice. This process begins with greater willingness among funders to embrace and support experimentation. One INGO leader said,



*It's something we're talking about quite a bit. How do we work with the donor so that they understand the necessity for agility and experimentation? Because otherwise, you can only sell already proven approaches, but we have seen that the proven approaches are not getting us to where we need to be because of the situation of the planet."*

Many interviewees also emphasized wanting funders to enter partnerships with a stronger learning orientation and tolerance for falling short of goals. Interviewees want to take the time to mine their challenges and failures for lessons that will lead to future advancement. Social entrepreneurs Kyle Zimmer and Kristine Pearson recognized that “fail fast” has become a theory of corporate innovation, but that this is not recognized in the social sector.<sup>43</sup> We cannot expect this sector to produce social change if the admission of failure constantly threatens the already scarce resources social actors can access. And while it would be ideal to be able to experiment without losing money, the reality is that innovation and failure are completely intertwined. Funders have to be willing and prepared to accept occasional failures on the way toward developing effective solutions.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/de-de/embracing-complexity>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/07/this-is-what-holds-social-entrepreneurs-back/>

# WHAT INTERMEDIARIES CAN DO

## FACILITATE COLLABORATION

Most of our interviewees reported that the primary role of intermediaries, such as (local and international) social entrepreneurship support organizations (e.g., Acumen, Ashoka, or Echoing Green), is to foster collaboration among other stakeholders, especially between INGOs and social entrepreneurs. To most INGOs, this collaboration-building role means sourcing and selecting social entrepreneurs who will be a strong fit for partnership with INGOs. On their own, INGOs rarely have the time or expertise to vet innovative social entrepreneurs. Given that reality, intermediaries can bring great value by taking the lead in sourcing, evaluating, and promoting promising social entrepreneurs and enterprises. In this way, intermediaries can fill a unique and needed role in the social innovation supply chain.



*People that have both social business and NGO experience are crucial to bridge the different sectors, experiences, and operational systems. They are crucial to nail down partnerships and to support crafting a detailed agreement. They sit between the parties and support in negotiating the relationship.”*

In addition to sourcing and selection, intermediaries could serve as a valuable third party ensuring that conversations between potential partners continue. They bring the expertise to facilitate strategic collaborations and scaling partnerships. Moreover, intermediaries have a role to play to help social entrepreneurs understand how large INGOs operate, and to support them to improve their organizational readiness to partner up effectively. Our interviews shared that intermediaries could even shepherd these relationships through times of conflict. They could be the “*a translator between the worlds*” of INGOs and social entrepreneurs, as one interviewee said.



*Building trust and understanding so that people on all sides see value in collaboration [is a key function that intermediaries can play.]”*

## Ashoka and CARE Impact Transfer Program: Replicating Proven Solutions



With financial support from the Austrian Development Cooperation, CARE and Ashoka have piloted the 'Impact Transfer Program' in East Africa over the past three years. The program aims to accelerate the replication of proven solutions of social entrepreneurs addressing local needs. The Impact Transfer Program provides scaling readiness support, matches originators of solutions with replication partners, and facilitates the co-creation process between these partners<sup>44</sup>. The Impact Transfer Program supports CARE to address key development challenges, by sourcing and selecting proven solutions that address pre-defined challenges, facilitating the co-creation of the partnership between the proven solution and the CARE local office, piloting the partnership, and drawing learnings, with the intention to go to scale.

CARE benefits from access to proven innovations which can be adapted and adopted into CARE's strategy and programs along with opportunities to foster a more entrepreneurial culture among their staff. Social entrepreneurs benefit from access to CARE's assets and expertise as a platform to scale their impact. Ashoka leverages its network of social and its expertise to facilitate collaborations with systems change potential.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.ashoka.org/en-gb/program/new-allies>

## SHARE KNOWLEDGE

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Several INGO leaders expressed that intermediaries have a major opportunity to enhance learning across the social innovation field by identifying and showcasing best practices. With an overwhelming number of NGOs in the world, there is massive potential to increase the volume and circulation of publicized thought leadership on how best to promote social innovation, whether through conference presentations, webinars, or formal written pieces. One interviewee suggested that intermediaries translate findings for different audiences – for example, presenting technical research findings to an academic audience or sharing high-impact stories with potential funders. In this way, intermediaries can shape insights to be both academically rigorous and practically useful, thus maximizing potential for adoption and for meaningful, sustained impact.

Intermediaries themselves are often founts of wisdom. INGOs are often without the specialized knowledge intermediaries have about lean start-up approaches, scaling strategies, systems-change, cross-sector collaboration, impact investment, and collective impact frameworks. INGOs should leverage this knowledge to better prepare for partnership with social entrepreneurs and advance their social innovation efforts.

### CASE EXAMPLE

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## The Ashoka Visionary Program: Empowering Social Innovators of INGOs

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The Ashoka Visionary Program is a pioneering leadership program for executives and innovation leaders from the corporate world, the public sector and civil society. Participants are supported to develop system changing initiatives in their environment and within their organizational context. They get access to Ashoka's global network of resources, know-how, partners, and social entrepreneurs. The Ashoka Visionary Program is a social change laboratory, in which a new culture of cross-sector collaboration emerges.

Participants develop and prototype new ideas together, and often in collaboration with Ashoka and its Fellows. 300 participants have graduated the program since its start in 2015 forming a powerful Alumni community across Europe and Africa.<sup>45</sup>

Since its inception in 2015, many innovation leaders and social intrapreneurs from INGOs have been participating in the program. SOS Children Village's International, several national Red Cross societies and CARE member organizations have utilized the program to build up internal skills and capacity on social entrepreneurship and innovation, to empower their intrapreneurs and to connect with the social entrepreneurship ecosystems.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.ashoka-visionaryprogram.org/>



## CONSIDER INGOS AS PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM

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Intermediaries are fiercely devoted to establishing social entrepreneurship and innovation as a new field of development impact. To this end, they invite governments, corporations, as well as financial and educational institutions to build the ecosystem needed for social entrepreneurs to thrive. Until recently, it was unusual to see INGOs among this list of partners. We hope this report will encourage intermediaries to consider INGOs as part of their network, to learn how they operate, and to identify opportunities for collaboration, especially as it relates to how INGOs work with social entrepreneurs. Intermediaries, after all, are positioned to address barriers that impede productive collaboration between INGOs and social entrepreneurs. Moreover, intermediaries can support identifying systemic barriers in international development that INGOs and social entrepreneurs can jointly tackle.



*Intermediaries bring the network vision, the systems mapping, the ecosystem perspective and experience, that is where they can play an important role: to tear down ecosystem barriers, to catalyze a movement, and to advocate towards enabling environments."*

### CASE EXAMPLE

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## Proportion Global and the Innovators Team: Facilitating Peer-to-Peer Learning

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Proportion Global is a localized human-centered design agency with local innovation experts in more than 45 countries across the global south. Through its decentralized approach, Proportion is challenging the traditional modus operandi of foreign technical assistance, with its dominant role of international consultants often based in donor countries. This is especially relevant for social innovation, which requires to run rapid research-ideate-prototype-test-learn cycles whereby users and customers at the base-of-the-pyramid are actively engaged throughout the design process. Local innovation experts are a critical enabler in this process.

They often operate as the glue between INGOs and local social entrepreneurs, bridging the multiple barriers discussed in the report and coaching both sides on the job to innovate together.<sup>46</sup> In 2021, Proportion Global initiated a monthly round table for Innovation Directors of development agencies and INGOs, known as the "Innovators Team". Current Innovator Team members are Plan International, CARE, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Islamic Relief Worldwide, Oxfam Novib and GIZ. It's a learning circle where the participants reflect and exchange on their work as innovation leaders and intrapreneurs. They can propose innovation challenges to the group for peer-to-peer feedback and advice. Specialized social innovation organizations are invited for expert input. Together, new ideas and collaboration opportunities are developed.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://proportion.global/community/>



# APPENDIX

## INTERVIEW PARTNERS

The list below provides an overview of the leaders and organizations interviewed, many of whom took additional efforts to review the draft report. We thank our interviewees for taking the time, sharing their insights and being critical and supportive with us.

- 1. Abu Musuuza**, Founder, FLIP Africa (Uganda)
- 2. Alexandra Machado**, Founder, Girl MOVE Academy Africa (Mozambique, Portugal)
- 3. Andrew Nyathi**, Founder, The New Idea (South Africa)
- 4. Anne Merkle**, Innovation Culture Manager & Global A-team for Innovation Coordinator, WWF International (Switzerland)
- 5. Arlett Stojanovic**, Head of Competence Centre Innovation, Knowledge Sharing and Learning, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (Germany)
- 6. Benjamin Kumpf**, Head of Innovation for Development at the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (France)
- 7. Bernhard Kowatsch**, Head of Innovation Accelerator, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) (Germany)
- 8. Brian Richardson**, Founder, Wizzit (South Africa)
- 9. Carla Lopez**, Associate Director for Health, Airbel Impact Lab, International Rescue Committee (US)
- 10. Chandani Punia**, Global Hub Innovation Lead, Plan International (Colombia)
- 11. Charlotte Badenoch**, Interim Head of Social Finance, Plan International (Kenya)
- 12. Christabell Makokha**, Senior Director, Innovation, CARE USA (Kenya)
- 13. David Katzlinger**, Head of Department Institutional Partnership Development, SOS-Children's Villages International (Austria)
- 14. Dr. Wamuyu Mahinda**, Founder, Youth Banner, Collaborative Value Partners (Kenya)
- 15. Farmer Tantoh**, Founder, Save your Future Association (Cameroon)
- 16. Helen Samuelsson**, Innovation Specialist, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (Sweden)
- 17. Ilya Yacevich**, Founder, The Global Trauma Project (Kenya)
- 18. Irene Mutumba**, Founder, Private Education Development Network (Uganda)
- 19. Jennifer Unchendu**, Founder, SustyVibes (Nigeria)

- 20. Karima Grant**, Founder, Ker Imagination (Senegal)
- 
- 21. Ken Banks**, Director of Future Data and Digital Self-Management, Macmillan Cancer Support; Founder, Kiwanja.net and FrontlineSMS (UK)
- 
- 22. Kevin McAndrew**, Director Innovation, The Rockefeller Foundation (US)
- 
- 23. Kimberly Coletti**, Director, Leverage Information for Transformation (LIFT) Lab
- 
- 24. Maggie Korde**, Country Director Rwanda and Burundi, Save the Children (Rwanda)
- 
- 25. Marc de Klerk**, Innovation Specialist, Oxfam Novib (Netherlands)
- 
- 26. Markus Scheffel**, Innovation Specialist, Competence Centre Innovation, Knowledge Sharing and Learning, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (Germany)
- 
- 27. Okelo Fekadu**, Head of Experimentation, Accelerator Labs, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Ethiopia)
- 
- 28. Oluseun Onigbinde**, Founder, BudgIT (Nigeria)
- 
- 29. Priscilla Achakpa**, Founder, Women Environmental Programme (Nigeria)
- 
- 30. Regina Honu**, Founder, Soronko Academy (Ghana)
- 
- 31. Shaun Hazeldine**, Innovation Lead, Head of Solferino Academy,

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Italy)

- 32. Thomas Schuurmans**, Founder, Proportion International (Netherlands)

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# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

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Ashoka identifies and supports the world's leading social entrepreneurs, learns from the patterns in their innovations, and mobilizes a global community that embraces these new frameworks to build an "everyone a changemaker world."

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