

# SHIFTING POWER AND RESOURCES TO GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

Findings from consultations with activists and funders, July 2019

## WHY THIS RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT...

The question of how grassroots groups and activists based in the global south can mobilise adequate support to overcome the growing ecological, social, political and economic challenges they face and achieve positive change is a serious one that requires our attention. These groups face significant challenges in accessing key resources (financial and otherwise) to sustain their work.

In recent years, progressive funders and civil society platforms have explored different resourcing strategies and modalities that better support smaller, less formal groups to continue their work and amplify their positive impact, especially at the local level. Feminist funds and community philanthropy organisations have long been at the forefront of this effort, but there is a lot more that could be done to fill important resourcing gaps across movements and geographies. There is a struggle to identify practical and innovative resourcing tools for grassroots actors beyond the traditional development aid framework. There is also a lack of methods to bring innovative approaches to fruition.

In response to this challenge, CIVICUS embarked on a consultation process to identify, in a participatory way, possible mechanisms that would increase the scale and quality of resources, both international and domestic, for these groups and movements. Over the course of five months, we have had the privilege to learn from activists, organisers, young leaders and progressive funders from around the world about resourcing challenges, and to sense-check solutions and co-create scenarios based on lived experiences, bold ideas and deep understanding of social problems.

This consultation is an attempt to move conversations forward at a practical level, exploring options that, pulled together, could help start a radical transformation in the range and quality of resources accessible to grassroots groups. As well as sense-checking the relevance, appeal and feasibility of emerging concepts, the process itself has been significant. These early explorations have directly engaged the groups that we seek to better resource, including a cross-section of grassroots activists, the financial arms of social movements and other strategic partners.

This document is a distillation of our findings and learnings.



## AN IN-DEPTH AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

Over the course of five months, the consultants leading this process undertook a literature review and held a wide range of interviews to inform thinking about a set of potential resourcing concepts, which were later developed and tested through further interviews, a survey and several focus group discussions. The process included:

- **5 STEERING CONVERSATIONS** with CIVICUS staff and board members
- **18 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS** with a wide range of representatives from grassroots movements and activist funders
- **1 IDEATION SESSION** undertaken by the consultancy team to develop new concepts
- **1 ONLINE SURVEY** on the proposed concepts sent to interviewees
- **8 INTERVIEWS** with sector experts
- **3 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS** with an international group of activists and funders to test the concepts (25 people participated)

# EMERGENT CONCEPTS

Four concepts were developed that could potentially increase the resources for and help shift the power towards global south grassroots movements, based on the challenges and needs identified during the initial consultation phases. Short descriptions of the concepts are outlined below, and at [this link you can find additional details](#), including the main comments and reactions from the various activists and funders consulted.



**A GRASSROOTS CHANGE LAB** - a flexible working space within countries that welcomes people from grassroots movements, civil society organisations (CSOs) and funders, to work in the same space, meet and make connections. It would offer incubator sessions to co-create and fund new projects, share new business models, provide training and seminars, and offer access to peer and expert advice on resourcing.



**A NON-BRANDED BASKET FUND** - which distributes small unrestricted grants (up to US\$50,000) to frontline groups, using light and creative application and reporting processes, facilitated by a new bespoke app and designed and governed by CSOs.



**A "QUALITY TRADEMARK" FOR FUNDERS** - which would incentivise and reward funders for empowering grassroots movements. The quality trademark would be designed by activists and implemented by a secretariat, and would support funders to improve their policies and practices with training and support.



**AN ONLINE RESOURCING PLATFORM** - which would connect, advise and support grassroots movements to meet their resourcing needs and develop new, alternative resourcing approaches. It would be designed by tech experts working with activists, and facilitate access to opportunities and technical advice while contributing to efficiencies and connections.



**IN THE TABLE BELOW, THE CONCEPTS ARE MAPPED AGAINST THE SOLUTIONS THEY OFFER BEFORE GOING ON TO EXPLAIN THEM IN MORE DETAIL BELOW.**

	Accessible, long-term, core and flexible funding	Funding for grassroots movements, particularly in restrictive contexts	Build relationships that enable the sharing of non-financial resources	Unlock other resources
Concept 1: Grassroots Change Lab	✓	✓	✓	✓
Concept 2: Non-Branded Basket Fund	✓	✓		
Concept 3: Quality Trademark for Funders	✓			
Concept 4: Online Resourcing Platform			✓	✓



# WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

## 1 THE POWER OF CO-CREATION

This consultation emphasised how important the work of co-creation and participatory design is. The focus groups were a vital part of this consultation and allowed us to sense-check, prove and further design innovative approaches. Experts can identify new and bold ideas that make a lot of sense on paper but when these are adopted without contextual know-how, adequate testing and value verification, they have a high risk of failing. Building a dedicated space for co-creation with activists and funders served exactly this purpose: their knowledge and lived experience provided key information that had not been shared before.

## 2 CONTEXT MATTERS, ALWAYS

Blueprint solutions are usually not useful. Any valid mechanism to support social change has to be grounded in the particular experiences, traditions, political contexts and needs of a given community or movement and has to be able to shift and change to adapt to constantly changing needs. This is particularly relevant in the case of social movements.

## 3 KEEP POWER IN CHECK

Support mechanisms must provide for meaningful inclusion of diverse actors, especially those not usually heard. Working groups, task forces and advisory panels create structures that perpetuate power, while flexible, open and inclusive decision-making produces better results. Several of the activists engaged in the process encouraged funders – including some from the most progressive and participatory circles – to be more mindful of and responsible with their power.

## 4 SPACE IS A KEY RESOURCE

The need for safe spaces – physical and virtual – where grassroots movements and other parts of civil society can meet, cross-pollinate, organise and share resources, intelligence and other assets came up very strongly during this consultation. Be it in the form of a co-working space, a community self-organised centre or a virtual group, holding these spaces is considered a precious resource and highly demanded.

## >>> MOVING FORWARD

The next phase of our work following this consultation, from July 2019 to June 2020, will focus on and dig deeper into these emergent themes:

**1** As a starting point, at CIVICUS we will identify principles and elements from each of the above concepts that can be embedded into existing CIVICUS initiatives, grant-making practices and specific areas of work.

**2** We will explore the strategic alignment, feasibility and added value of CIVICUS further developing and testing one of these concepts, or a spin off of one. We will assess how the concept can contribute to changing donor behaviour towards a more inclusive, community-led and distributed system, or help grassroots movements develop alternative sources of support and funding that will ultimately reduce their reliance on international aid and help them become more sustainable.

**3** Since these are all valuable prototypes that have been already sense-checked with potential users, we will present the four concepts to relevant groups that we feel might be keen and well placed to take them forward. We are planning to organise a dedicated learning session, around September or October 2019, inviting various organisations involved in the previous reflections, plus other potentially relevant groups, with the goal of establishing collaborative mechanisms to support the grassroots resourcing ecosystem. This meeting could be live-streamed so that more people can attend remotely.



## INTERESTED? LET US KNOW!

If you are interested in learning more about this consultation or participating in the further development of any of these concepts, please contact [clara.bosco@civicus.org](mailto:clara.bosco@civicus.org) or [yessenia.soto@civicus.org](mailto:yessenia.soto@civicus.org).



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