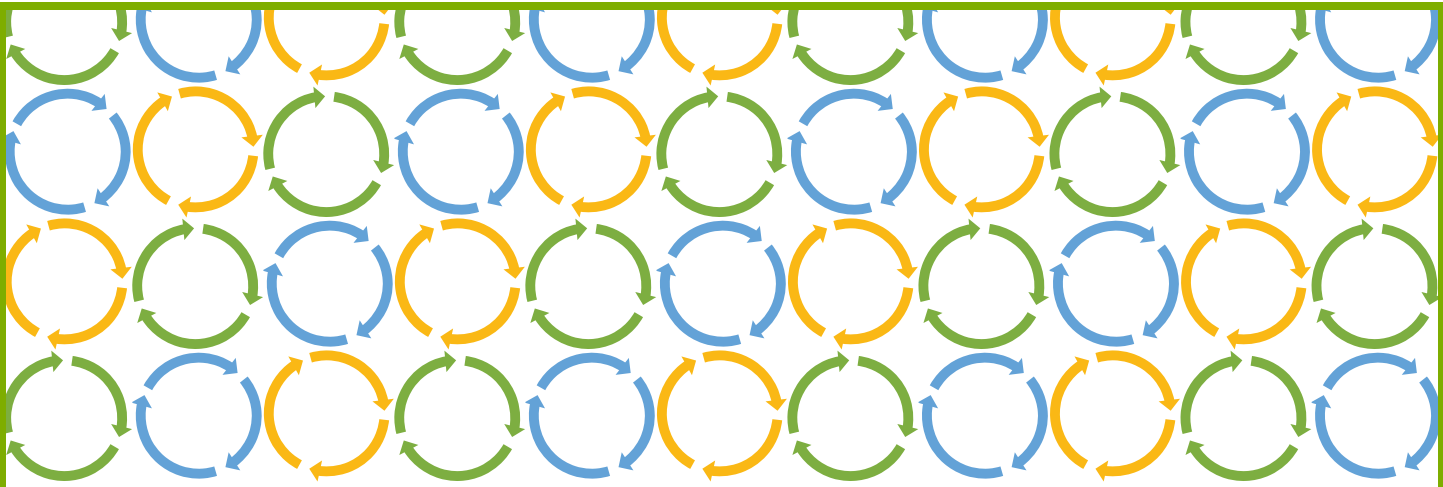




FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS

JUNE | How to Identify Local Partners
2026 | That Are Creating Real Change





TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
About the Framework	2
Primary Audience	2
Objective	2
The Framework	2
Figure 1: Framework Diagram	3
DIMENSIONS	4
Community Ownership	4
Social Cohesion	5
APPLICATION	6
How to Implement this Framework	6
Considerations	6
Figure 2: Questions for Potential Partners	8
APPENDICES	9
Methodology	9
Existing Tools & Frameworks	11
REFERENCES	12

AUTHORS

Roots of Development is a US-based nonprofit organization that was founded in 2007. We're working to shift the aid system in Haiti toward a locally led model by strengthening a national network of Haitian-led, community-powered organizations and driving international support for change through research and advocacy.

The research team for this project was led by Jessica Hsu, Head of Advocacy, Research, & Learning for Roots of Development. Jessica was supported by Managing Director Charlie Estes, American University graduate student Ashley Wakeling, and the Roots of Development Research & Advocacy Advisory Committee.

INTRODUCTION



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ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

Out of a pool of potential partners, how do funders know which local groups are best positioned to create truly long-term, transformational impact?

Unlike the many frameworks and recommendations that already exist to guide funders on how to fund in order to best support local¹ groups, this framework is intended to help funders select who to fund based on their intention and ability to strengthen social cohesion, community ownership, and trust.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE

Philanthropists and funders—including intermediaries, facilitators, and accompaniment organizations who redistribute funding to local actors—or anyone interested in linking short and mid-term outcomes to long-term change.

OBJECTIVE

This simple framework is meant to provide guidance to funders who are interested in supporting local partners to create positive, transformational change in their communities, linking² crisis response to long-term development and sustainable peacebuilding.

Rather than evaluating local groups solely on their ability to deliver short-term project outputs, this framework encourages funders to assess groups' contributions to the collective outcomes (Community Ownership, Social Cohesion, and Trust) that serve as critical pathways through which communities strengthen their ability to withstand shocks, recover from crises, reduce dependency on external assistance, and build the foundations for healthy communities and sustainable peace.³

THE FRAMEWORK

As illustrated in *Figure 1*, two interconnected, fundamental dimensions are foregrounded in this framework: 1) Community Ownership and 2) Social Cohesion. Between these two dimensions is Trust, the connective tissue of relationship building, which allows for a strong foundation between individuals, groups, and communities to foster community ownership and social cohesion.

These three elements—Community Ownership, Social Cohesion, and Trust—form a positive feedback loop:

- The more a community has ownership over the work, the more trust they build within themselves and with each other, and therefore the more social cohesion there is.
- The more social cohesion there is, the more trust there is among



community members, the more people are able to show up and contribute to initiatives, therefore strengthening community ownership.

A community that is socially cohesive can resolve their own conflicts; a community with agency and ownership

can respond quickly and effectively when disaster strikes. As time goes on, and these elements are further reinforced through repetition, they form the foundation for a community that is peaceful, economically prosperous, and able to withstand shocks.



Figure 1: Framework Graphic

DIMENSIONS



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COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

When communities have control at every step—decision making, project implementation, resource uses, and evaluation—projects are relevant, locally led, and sustainable.

Components:

Decision-Making Power - Communities are central in decision making, a bottom up-approach is used to shift typical power structures, and community knowledge and decisions are valued and used within all processes.

Shared Responsibility - Communities are creators of their own outcomes, shifting power from international and national actors to local actors; communities take responsibility for project implementation and processes.

Resource Mobilization - As many of the project's resources—material, financial, and human—as possible are sourced from communities or the local area.

Results:

When communities have ownership over projects, they:

- Design and implement projects that fit their needs and vision for their community and that are aligned with local realities.

- Become invested in the success and impact of the project, increasing long-term thinking and leading to more sustainable results that last beyond project funding.
- Strengthen their ability to mobilize for and implement projects in the future without external funding or support.
- Increase their belief in the capacity and agency of themselves and of local leadership.
- Build trust within and among the people and groups contributing to the project and the wellbeing of the community.

SOCIAL COHESION

When communities are socially cohesive, individuals feel connected to their community and their public institutions beyond just shared geography and are committed to strengthening the overall wellbeing of their community and the other people within it.

Components:

Cooperation & Mutual Accountability - Local groups cooperate not only internally but with members of the community, local authorities, and other local groups, creating multidirectional accountability for project outcomes.



Sense of Belonging - Local groups foster a sense of inclusion, equity, and safety for all members of their community, reaching out to underrepresented members and creating space for everyone to contribute and benefit.

Collective Vision & Values - Local groups build a shared vision for the community with community members themselves, along with culturally rooted and relevant values that the group exemplifies through their words and actions.

Results:

When social cohesion is strengthened through a project or program:

- There is less competition for resources.
- People feel included and bought-in to the wellbeing of their community.
- Projects are aligned with the community's shared vision for their own future.
- There is more cooperation and less conflict in the community in the long-term.
- Trust—among individuals, between individuals and institutions, among community groups—is strengthened, allowing for further cooperation and collective action.

APPLICATION



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HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS FRAMEWORK

Figure 2 contains a short list of questions for you as a funder to incorporate into your partner selection process. We've intentionally framed them as open-ended so as to not give away the "correct" answer in the question itself.

These work best as discussion questions, rather than as written questions on an application form. Asking them as part of a conversation will allow you to ask follow-ups and ascertain depth of understanding and integration of these concepts into your potential partners' work, ensuring that you get the best overall picture of their ability to create long-term change.⁴

We recommend that you ask these questions of, not only the leader of your potential partner group, but other members of the group and/or community. We also always recommend approaching other funders or accompanying partners for their experiences and recommendations regarding the group.

As a reminder: this is not meant to be a post-implementation Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework.⁵ Your local partners should be the ones defining what success means for them and their communities in M&E processes—these questions are intended solely to help funders ascertain which of their

potential partners are working to build Social Cohesion, Community Ownership, and Trust, and are therefore best positioned to create long-term change.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. In this framework, "local" or "community-based" groups or organizations refer to those most proximate to communities and the challenges they face.
2. This framework applies "[Nexus](#)" thinking, which acknowledges that humanitarian response, long-term development, and sustainable peace are not separate sectors, but interconnected.
3. In order to achieve these transformational impacts, any funding and accompaniment received by local groups must align with the wants and needs of the community, the values and principles of the local group, and the evidence-backed tenets of Trust-Based Philanthropy, Community-led Development, Supporting Community-led Response, Asset-Based Community Development, and/or others. (See the appendix for relevant frameworks and tools).
4. This framework is not meant to stand on its own or replace other potential metrics that measure the success and/or efficacy of a particular



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| <p>initiative or organization.</p> <p>5. This is not intended to be a standard Monitoring & Evaluation format for local groups. M&E systems should be guided by what</p> | <p>the local group and its community defines as success for themselves through Community-Led Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (COLMEAL) processes, not based on requirements from donors.</p> |
|--|--|



Figure 2: Questions for Potential Partners

QUESTION	CORRESPONDING DIMENSION(S)
What is the story of your group? How did it start and how has it changed?	- Community Ownership: Shared Responsibility - Social Cohesion: Collective Vision & Values
Does your group have shared principles and values? How were these developed and decided? How do you share those with the community? If you don't have expressly written values, what would you consider a non-negotiable for your group? What will you absolutely never do, or what do you always do?	- Social Cohesion: Sense of Belonging - Social Cohesion: Collective Vision & Values
How do you foster relationships within your group and the larger community? Are there particular segments of the population that you gear specific outreach towards (or hope to in the future)?	- Social Cohesion: Sense of Belonging - Community Ownership: Shared Responsibility
How does your group come up with projects or initiatives? Tell us about your proudest accomplishment and perhaps what you are less proud of, but was perhaps a learning moment?	- Community Ownership: Decision-Making Power - Community Ownership: Shared Responsibility
How do you foster transparency and effective communication?	- Social Cohesion: Collective Vision & Values - Social Cohesion: Cooperation & Mutual Accountability
How do you utilize local resources?	Community Ownership: Resource Mobilization

APPENDICES



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METHODOLOGY

The development of this framework followed an iterative, multi-phase process that combined extensive secondary research with expert consultation and validation. Rather than beginning with predetermined metrics, the process sought to identify the collective outcomes most consistently associated with positive, long-term impacts across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming.

Phase One: Broad Evidence Review

The initial phase consisted of a comprehensive review of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, advocacy briefs, evaluation reports, and gray literature produced by international NGOs, UN agencies, bilateral donors, and multilateral institutions. Particular attention was given to evidence examining collective outcomes linked to sustainable, long-term impact, especially within the context of the Humanitarian– Development– Peacebuilding (HDP) Nexus.

The review intentionally cast a wide net across existing frameworks and approaches rather than focusing on any single model. Particular attention was given to evidence emerging from approaches such as Supporting Community-Led Response (SCLR),

Community-Led Development (CLD), support for self-help and mutual aid groups, and other locally led responses in which communities most affected by crises or chronic challenges take primary responsibility for defining priorities and leading action.

This review generated an extensive list of potential collective outcomes, metrics and indicators.

Phase Two: Identification of Foundational Dimensions

The preliminary list was presented to the [Roots of Development Research & Advocacy Advisory Committee](#) for discussion and reflection based on their extensive work and experience.

Guided by these discussions, the research team returned to the literature to further examine patterns emerging across the evidence. Rather than treating numerous collective outcomes as separate endpoints, the analysis sought to identify the foundational conditions that consistently enabled sustainable transformation across different sectors and contexts.

This iterative analysis led to the identification of two interconnected foundational dimensions—community ownership and social cohesion—with trust emerging as the critical element linking the two. These dimensions were then examined across the existing evidence base and selected case



studies to assess their relationship with sustainable peace, resilience, institutional strengthening, and broader transformational outcomes.

Phase Three: Deep-Dive Analysis and Framework Development

The emerging conceptual framework was subsequently presented to the Advisory Committee for further review and refinement. Feedback informed a deeper examination of each foundational dimension, extending beyond aid programming to include broader literature from diverse fields.

This deeper analysis explored how community ownership and social cohesion function within communities independently of external interventions and how these dimensions are the pathways to community members building stronger, healthier and more peaceful communities

The findings were then reintegrated into the framework to examine how these foundational dimensions contribute to sustainable peace, overall community well-being, strengthened resilience, and the capacity to withstand and recover from future shocks. This process enabled the development of clearly defined dimensions and components which are detailed in the framework.

Phase Four: Framework Operationalization

Drawing on the accumulated evidence, existing measurement tools, and the previous phases of analysis, an initial set of measurement questions was developed. Questions were reviewed for conceptual clarity, overlap, and practical applicability before being refined and consolidated into a draft assessment framework.

Phase Five: Validation and Refinement

The draft framework was shared with the Advisory Committee, together with additional practitioners and researchers within the broader organizational ecosystem. Their feedback informed the final refinement of the “Framework for Funders: How to Identify Local Partners That Are Creating Real Change.”



EXISTING TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

Below is a partial list of existing tools and frameworks that offer guidance to funders on partnerships with and support to local organizations, mutual aid groups, etc., or provide concrete ways to measure related indicators. All of the tools and frameworks in this list align with the principles of local-first change that guided the creation of our framework.

The research presented in this document joins these complementary tools and frameworks in the larger body of evidence that supports the localization and Shift the Power movements within the aid sector.

- [Asset-Based Community Development \(ABCD\) Framework](#) from ABCD Institute at Northwestern University.
- [Peace Impact Framework](#) from Search for Common Ground
- [6 Trust-Based Practices at a Glance](#) from Trust-Based Philanthropy Project
- [Supporting Community-Led Response \(SCLR\) Framework](#) from Local to Global Protection
- [Community-Driven Change Assessment Toolkit](#) from Bridgespan
- [The Konbit Guide](#) from Gwoup Konbit, available on [Amazon](#)
- [Measuring Localization: Framework and Tools](#) from Humanitarian Advisory Group
- [OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust](#) from OECD
- [Participatory CLD Assessment Tool](#) from the Movement for Community-Led Development
- [Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation](#) from Peace Direct
- [Roadmap for Supporting Self-Help Groups](#) from the Share Trust
- [Tools for Agency and Effectiveness](#) from the Share Trust

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