

# Reflections from the 8th East Africa Philanthropy Conference 2023: \_\_\_\_\_

Catalyzing Collective  
Action for Systems  
Transformation



The 8th East Africa Philanthropy Conference in 2023, themed '**Systems Transformation: Catalyzing Collective Action**', was convened from June 28th to June 30th in Zanzibar, Tanzania. This gathering united local charitable trusts, foundations, and not-for-profit organizations, both from within and beyond the African continent. The conference aimed to foster collaboration, explore systems transformation, co-create solutions for collective philanthropic action, inspire innovations, and share best practices within the international development sector.

Three key words centered the conversations that ensued at this conference: **Engagement, Enrichment, and Empowerment**. The conference was inaugurated by the first Vice President of Zanzibar, H.E Othman Masoud Othman. Over three days, participants engaged in plenary and breakout sessions that allowed smaller group discussions on specific topics. CivSource Africa was ably represented by the CEO, Jacqueline Asiimwe who delivered opening remarks as the chairperson of the board EAPN. The rest of the team present included Bweme Antonio, Afoyomungu Olum Lornah, Ainembabazi Madonna Vicky and Treasure Layola.

The plenary discussion on driving collective action for philanthropy delved into holistic approaches for driving change in line with systems transformation. Key questions included the design of the philanthropy system, underlying ethics for equitable outcomes, strategies for system transformation, inclusion of new actors, and exclusion of outdated ones. The discussions emphasized the need to localize international development efforts, democratize and empower the State, and foster collaboration among philanthropic actors.

Systems Change was a core topic around which the many conversations were centered and among these, a session on **Systems change Mechanisms: Leveraging Local Opportunities**. This session united donors, funded partners, and intermediaries to leverage local opportunities for systems change. Topics explored included accountability structures, digital safety for children online, mainstreaming digital development, and collaboration with the State. Participants discussed strategies such as trust-based funding, embracing technology, and human rights-based development.

Acknowledging that philanthropy is enabled or stifled by legal frameworks, participants engaged in discussions around re-engineering Supportive Policy, Legal, and Institutional Frameworks. Here, we examined ways to shape regulatory and institutional frameworks to create a more favorable philanthropic ecosystem. Challenges discussed included the lack of harmonization of laws, ignorance of legal regimes, and colonial-era laws hindering cross-border philanthropy. Suggestions included coordination within civil society, regional harmonization, leveraging public opinion, and engaging high-profile networks.

Regarding building **Strong, Resilient, and Sustainable Organizations, the STEP** framework was introduced for due diligence in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and funders. STEP focuses on compliance and risk management, emphasizing trust-based funding and reducing organizational burdens. It encourages a reassessment of risk categories and fosters dignified partnership onboarding.

Some philanthropy practices are premised on Pan-African and Feminist theories; but what does that mean in practice? **Participants explored Pan-African and Feminist Philanthropies (PAFP)** as catalysts for systems transformation. Challenges in the sector, such as shrinking civic space and insufficient funding for women's rights organizations, were addressed. Solutions included supporting social movements, flexible grantmaking, and bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice.

A session was also held on weaving **Resilience to Revitalize Civic Engagement**: This session examined organizational resilience in changing economic and funding structures. Organizations from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda shared their experiences. Key lessons emphasized local empowerment, disruptive actions against social inequalities, collective action, risk-taking, and technology integration.

The key takeaways from the 8th East Africa Philanthropy Conference 2023 encompassed a range of practical insights for attendees to implement. These lessons included recognizing the empowering potential of local philanthropy, particularly in grassroots initiatives, and the essential role of disruptive actions in combating social inequalities for a more equitable society. The conference also emphasized the importance of collective action in achieving lasting and meaningful change and encouraged philanthropic actors to embrace calculated risks for innovative approaches. It highlighted the significance of proposing interventions tailored to each community's unique needs rather than imposing standardized solutions. The pivotal role of technology and data in driving systems transformation was acknowledged, along with the understanding that financial resources alone cannot drive societal change; activism and energy play crucial roles. Shifting from financial metrics to impact assessment in reporting was advocated, as well as aligning philanthropic efforts with community needs and adopting an intersectionality lens to address multifaceted oppressions comprehensively. Lastly, the wisdom and experience of seasoned individuals in the sector were recognized as invaluable resources for guidance in Africa's philanthropic endeavors.

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