

# EVALUATION OF THE COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE PHASE II

2014-2020

by Cathy James & Isabel Turner



# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Impact	7
Learning	23
Conclusions	29
Way Forward	31
Credits	33



# INTRODUCTION

---



£110m

pre-2009

- 180 grants to small organisations
- 80 grants to diaspora orgs
- DFID (now FCDO) approached Comic Relief

2009-2014



£45m

- Project (IA) grants up to £1 million over 5 years
- Diaspora advocacy/ChangeMakers programme
- Organisation development grants
- Research, consultation and planning grants

2015-2020



The Comic Relief  
COMMON  
GROUND  
INITIATIVE



£10.4m

£7m

Small and Diaspora UK fund

- 'Generating Ideas' and 'Implementing and Adapting' grants

CGI for diaspora and African organisations

- finance and investment
- women and girls' rights

**A BIT OF HISTORY**



Photo: Women and Children First



This evaluation demonstrates the **lasting and significant impact** of the £20 million Common Ground Initiative phase II (CGI II), co-funded by Comic Relief and FCDO from 2014-19.

The programme built on Comic Relief's commitment to UK 'diaspora' organisations, where the majority of trustees is of African heritage and 'small' organisations whose annual turnover is under £1 million.



Building on CGI Phase I, CGI II had two components: the first **supported four diaspora strategic partners** to maximise their unique contribution to development in Africa; the other provided **grants to both small and diaspora organisations for projects supporting disadvantaged people in Africa**.



CGI II funding from FCDO ended in March 2019, but the initiative continued into 2020. A 2014 external evaluation of the first phase (Chapman 2014) found that it was an **"immensely valuable initiative"** and "immensely relevant" to the aid context, where it is hard for small and diaspora organisations to access funding, especially for organisational development.

## Relevance to context

Global interest in the role of the diaspora in development has increased greatly. In 2018, the diaspora contributed \$86 billion in remittances to Africa (money sent to family and community), highlighting their importance to the development of the continent.



Both Comic Relief and FCDO are going through significant change. The evaluation presents the opportunity to understand and strategically maximise the unique contribution of effective small and diaspora UK organisations, without significant risk.



“Debates about sustainability and shifting power to the South are amplified by Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement.”

---

# IMPACT

---



# CGI II components and expected outcomes

- I. Increased and diversified **diaspora investment** in small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa;
- II. Improvements in the **lives of women and girls**;
- III. Improved **social and economic wellbeing** of disadvantaged people.

Outcomes i and ii were delivered by four UK diaspora organisations, proactively selected by Comic Relief. These aimed to **fund and enhance partnerships between UK diaspora and African organisations**.

Outcome iii was delivered through the **Small and Diaspora UK NGO fund** which aligned projects to Comic Relief's strategic themes at that time of health, HIV, education, street and working children and young people, women and girls, people living in slums, and trade and enterprise.



Photo: Lifeline Network International



# The four Delivery Partners

Funded partner	Theme	Countries	Distinctive character (grant documents & funder comments)
<b>AFFORD</b> <b>(Africa Foundation for Development)</b> Funded by CR since 2001	Diaspora investment	Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “widely recognised legitimacy” across diaspora</li> <li>• “strong identity and values”</li> <li>• “an invisible army” of voluntary resource people</li> <li>• strong networks in &amp; outside diaspora</li> </ul>
<b>ATBN</b> <b>(Africa Technology Business Network)</b> first grant ever received	Women and Girls	Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only registered as a limited company</li> <li>• start-up tech initiative with 500 members, only running networking events before</li> <li>• “really interesting and transformational”</li> </ul>
<b>FORWARD</b> Funded by CR since 1998	Women and Girls	Britain, Tanzania, Uganda, Somaliland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “leading diaspora women’s organisation”</li> <li>• significant experience in tackling FGM</li> <li>• strength in choice of partners &amp; networks</li> <li>• getting young people leading change</li> </ul>
<b>iSpace Foundation</b> new to Comic Relief	Women and Girls	Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working in tech space in Ghana &amp; London</li> <li>• developing an eco-system for entrepreneurs</li> <li>• “exciting and innovative hub organisation”</li> <li>• focus on inclusion of women in male space</li> </ul>



The first of the two strands of the programme focused on four diaspora ‘Delivery Partners’, selected pro-actively.





£2.9 million CGI II grant over 3 years. Partners: AFFORD Sierra Leone; Enterprise Development Centre Nigeria; Empretec Zimbabwe; Private Sector Foundation Rwanda

---

## Changing the system of investment in Africa

Ground-breaking work by **AFFORD**, one of the four diaspora strategic partners, showed that you could unleash and more strategically channel diaspora funding to bring systemic and sustained change in Africa.

AFFORD increased diaspora investment in small and medium enterprises and improved business effectiveness, leading to social and economic change. It also tested other ways to **galvanise diaspora skills** and resources to benefit Africa through **crowdfunding**, **pro-bono support**, an effective professional volunteering programme, and by setting up a commercial bond for affordable housing in Rwanda.

# IMPACT



**AFRICA TECHNOLOGY  
BUSINESS NETWORK**

ATBN Ghana received £45,000 CGI II grant over 18 months.  
Partner: Women in Tech Africa (WITA), a pan-African network

---

## Young women entrepreneurs solve problems

ATBN's biggest impact was in **changing the mindsets of African young women to be problem-solvers**, using technology as a tool to impact the lives of other women. ATBN selected **young women participants in Ghana with ideas for starting a business** to attend an innovation boot-camp, followed by incubation in iSpace's business hub and mentoring from local and international business-women. This short grant achieved:

- **Leadership and confidence** of young women entrepreneurs
- **Women-led initiatives** impacting women and girls
- **Changing perspectives** of media on African young women.

Although small, the grant had multiplier effects. It created a network of diaspora mentors that is still active.

# IMPACT

# ISPACE

£552,097 grant over 3 years. Partners:  
Mobile Web Ghana; Ghana Code Club;  
and Radical Leap UK

---

## Promoting inclusion of young women in Ghana's tech space

The CGI II grant enabled iSpace to **change the narrative in Ghana about women in technology**. It led to 28 new start-up businesses, 80% of which have female founders. 300 young women from diverse backgrounds developed **new skills in programming and business development**. It not only taught them technical skills, but expanded its remit to support them in soft skills.

iSpace partnered with government and private sector, influencing how people think about women's role in society – and women in tech. It worked with government on **including coding in the national school curriculum** and set up a training programme, equipping teachers to run coding camps that recruited 60% female students to encourage them into coding and robotics.

# IMPACT

## FORWARD

£1,198,295 over 3 years. Partners:  
Akina Mama Wa Afrika Uganda;  
Children's Dignity Forum Tanzania;  
Somaliland Nursing and Midwifery  
Assoc; Kenya Women in Scotland;  
Sub Saharan Advisory Panel Wales

---

## Empowering our sisters to end sexual and gender-based violence

This grant has inspired a new generation of young African women from different countries (Britain, Somaliland, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda) to **take action against gender-based violence**. It has amplified their voices and invested in their social action projects.

As a result:

- **Young feminist leaders** champion women's rights: 178 young women are now confident to speak out and take action to transform the lives of others, reaching over 2,664 people.
- **Young activists' voices amplify and influence change**: Fellows have taken part in national and global advocacy. The United Nations Population Fund has co-opted them into its 2020 campaign #AgainstMyWill.
- **A feminist movement has grown** leading to changes in social norms: The grant has led to 55 networks so that, as a critical mass, Fellows influence and create change.

IMPACT

# Implementing and Adapting

## The Small and Diaspora UK NGO fund

26 Implementing and Adapting grants of up to £750,000 supported 17 small and 8 diaspora partner projects. Two others were cancelled. Only six partners (23%) were new to Comic Relief. 76% of grants supported work in East and Southern Africa, 12% in West Africa and 12% in Central Africa. Many worked in places and with groups that were hard to reach and facing difficult issues.

### Outcomes in social and economic wellbeing for disadvantaged people

---

Grants to UK small and diaspora organisations reached remote and marginalised people in Africa and brought about a range of outcomes:

- improved food security, land tenure and management and better livelihoods
- women's leadership, empowerment and protection
- improved access, retention and performance in school
- safety and integration for children at risk
- better access to health services, improving maternal and child health
- reduced stigma and more support for those with HIV/AIDS

327,110  
PEOPLE  
REACHED



# Food security and livelihoods

- Better food security and land management
- Improved income generation and employment

## Women lead community development and environment management

**Gaia Foundation** with Earthlore and WoMin in Zimbabwe have achieved better food security and built women's movements in Zimbabwe. The women lead community dialogue and activities to revive traditional seeds and food sources, improve use of land and strengthen farming. They have worked to tackle climate change, raise awareness about effective use of resources and promote renewable energy. They have run feminist training at regional and national level.

## Child soldiers' lives turned around

**Lifeline Network International** and Lifeline Nehemiah in Sierra Leone helped former child soldiers and other unemployed youth gain technical skills and jobs. By the end of the grant, 73% had secured employment, with anecdotal evidence of also achieving reduced crime.

Food security  
and livelihoods



Education



Children  
at risk



Women  
and Girls



Health and  
HIV/AIDS



# Education

- Improved access, retention and performance in school

## A chance for education in remote and conflict-affected areas

**Africa Future Development** (AFD) improved education for forest dwellers and marginalised pygmies in conflict-affected remote areas of Congo, with 84% retained in school. It trained inspectors and schools in data collection. In a second grant in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with its partner **APICOM**, it achieved 87% retention, a 69% pass rate and reduced child labour. It also improved community capacity to analyse problems and come up with solutions.

Food security  
and livelihoods



Education



Children  
at risk



Women  
and Girls



Health and  
HIV/AIDS



# Children at risk

- Reintegration of street-connected children
- Improved protection and reduced stigma

## Change for children branded as witches

Chemin Neuf and its partner LBM in DRC successfully helped over 600 children, including those branded as witches, back into their families, with a relapse rate of only 14% despite a difficult conflict-affected environment. They stabilised families and improved community acceptance and support for children. They also influenced the wider system by lobbying children's courts to improve protection and strengthened cooperation among different stakeholders through a local network.

## Reduced stigma for street-connected children with special needs

Improved protection and reduced stigma: **Chance for Childhood** and its partner KUAP in Kenya reduced stigma against street-connected children with special educational needs, reintegrating them in schools with learning support and improved practices to protect them, while also working with government to improve policies for street-connected children.

Food security and livelihoods



Education



Children at risk



Women and Girls



Health and HIV/AIDS



# Women and Girls

- Women lead community development and environment management
- Protection from harmful practices

## Protection for girls at risk of FGM and child marriage

**FORWARD** and its partners CDF, UMATI and Wadada in Tanzania helped girls and women become more aware of the negative effects of FGM and child marriage and of laws to protect them from violence. Girls in school clubs reported violence and improved their financial independence through income generating activities. Local authorities and professionals improved their response to cases of violence and their support for girls at risk.

Food security  
and livelihoods



Education



Children  
at risk



Women  
and Girls



Health and  
HIV/AIDS



# Health and HIV/AIDS

- Improved maternal and child health
- Improved access to HIV/AIDS support and reduction of stigma
- Strengthened health systems to bring change at scale

## Strengthening health systems to bring change at scale

ACE Africa UK and Tanzania influenced change at scale for people affected by HIV/AIDS by strengthening the health system. 35,000 people accessed health outreach services; 15,000 went for HIV testing; and 4,600 students in schools took part in sexual and health education classes. 95% of participants reported improved hope and 83% reduced stigma from the community. The project adapted its approach, using community drama and dialogue at awareness events to surface sensitive cultural issues, tackling stigma, myths about witchcraft and Anti-Retroviral drugs, and family planning (when government policy banned publicity). It carried out night-time testing and counselling. The project had a multiplier effect as people shared information and numbers grew each year beyond targets.

Food security  
and livelihoods



Education



Children  
at risk



Women  
and Girls



Health and  
HIV/AIDS



# Stronger Organisations



CGI II strengthened the funded organisations and their partners, resulting in **better programmes and organisational resilience**. Smaller organisations developed their **strategic capacity** and core functions. Larger ones improved their **effectiveness and efficiency and inclusiveness**. Many linked to new contacts and networks. Most particularly improved **monitoring, evaluation and learning**, using the evidence generated to leverage funding and scale up their work. However, fundraising remains a big challenge.

## **Risky start-up to international player**

**DeafKidz International** (DKI)'s research with **ChildLine South Africa** into the abuse suffered by **D/deaf children** set out the evidence that led to Comic Relief funding its work in Jamaica and its CGI II grant in South Africa. The grant made "significant progress" exceeding the number of targeted children so they were confident and able to disclose abuse, adapting website counselling and setting up a school-based counselling programme. It also improved police and court processes. It **tested video-relay technology so children could access live counselling** on ChildLine's website through a sign language interpreter. Although not fully achieved in the grant, this paved the way for UNICEF support to cascade it globally. DKI has taken learning into work in India. ChildLine, with its global reputation for protection, has integrated support for D/deaf children effectively into its work, staff capacity and data monitoring. DKI has gone on to secure funding from Oak Foundation, Laureus, Save the Children and EU. It is helping INGOs mainstream work with D/deaf and is contributing to WHO resources.

**"Comic Relief took a risk and invested in a start-up....It built this organisation. This funding gave us the credibility to establish ourselves as a global leader..." (partner)**



# Generating Ideas

The Small and Diaspora UK NGO fund

28 **Generating Ideas grants** of £10,000 supported 16 small and 12 diaspora organisations in research, planning, consultation or developing an idea: across Comic Relief strategic themes at that time, most of these grants went to Street and Working Children, Education, Trade and Enterprise, and Health – with one to Women and Girls and one to Slums.

Out of these, only **five went on to secure project grants**, known as 'Implementing and Adapting Grants' and one an Organisational Development grant.

**MAXIMUM  
GRANT SIZE  
£10,000  
for 6 months**

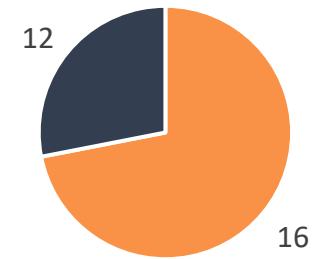
**x 28  
grants**

**TOTAL SPEND  
£275K  
from FCDO**



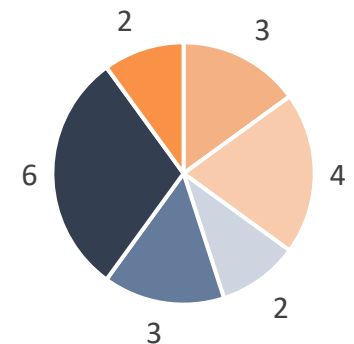
- Kenya (5)
- Malawi and Uganda (3)
- Somalia and Tanzania (2)
- Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Madagascar (1)
- Nigeria (3)
- Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso (1)
- DRC and Congo

## TYPE OF ORGANISATIONS



■ Small organisations ■ Diaspora organisations

## IMPACT POPULATIONS



■ Pastoralist/nomadic/remote groups ■ People with a disability  
■ Conflict-affected ■ Poor farming communities  
■ Vulnerable girls/women ■ Slum communities

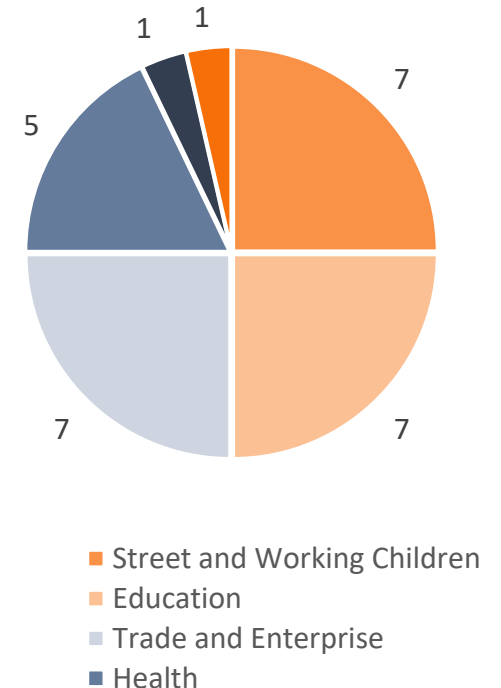
# Generating Ideas

- Strengthened organisational capacity
- Helped secure further funding
- Led to new approaches or paths
- Strengthened project planning and design

## Street connected children's voices influence international policy

The GI grant enabled Consortium for Street Children to consult children about their experiences on the street. The consultation and ensuing General Comment has now become the backbone of CSC's strategy and the focus for their advocacy. It has contributed to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child focusing its 2018 day of discussion on children as human rights defenders. Uruguay has consulted with children nationally and is launching a strategy for street children. CSC is supporting the Ghanaian government to organise a participatory national head count of vulnerable groups on the street.

## COMIC RELIEF FUNDING STREAM



# LEARNING

---

# What makes for sustainability?

## Organisational resilience:

1. **Accompaniment:** Quality mentoring enabled a deeper identification of priorities, increased the culture of learning and helped partners embed new skills in their approaches.
2. **Using funding strategically:** Effective partners managed to adapt and use donor priorities and funding to support their core development and mission, not allow it to divert them.
3. **Peer learning and support networks:** Developing links with peers for learning, sharing challenges and joint action or advocacy enabled partners to draw on this support beyond project funding.

## Sustainable approaches:

1. **Good research and consultation:** £10,000 'Generating ideas' grants improved ways of working, capacity and partnerships; leveraged further funding; and influenced others to play their part.
2. **Catalysing the system:** effective partners aligned to, and influenced, governments; supported community ownership; and galvanised movements and network, achieving greater scale.
3. **Problem-solving:** Approaches that enabled communities and groups to solve their own problems, rather than bringing a solution to them, created more sustained change.

# LEARNING

## Distinctive contribution of effective UK diaspora organisations

Testing assumptions about the distinctive contribution of diaspora organisations particularly was core to CGI's purpose. This evaluation evidences the '4 Rs' that apply to those that are **most effective**:



### Responsiveness

- bridge cultures, bringing perspective, nuance, sensitivity and language skills
- can tackle harmful norms and practices
- are relevant to context
- can respond fast in emerging situations



### Resilience

- passion for social change
- long-term commitment beyond projects & funding
- support local partner resilience
- link partners to support networks



### Resources

- mobilise diaspora commitment connections and skills
- identify new ways to sustain work
- reach difficult & marginalised groups



### Relationships

- link to a wide and different eco-system (see next slide)
- identify good partners funders may struggle to find
- take relationship-based approaches to strengthening partnerships, enabling tailored and appropriate support

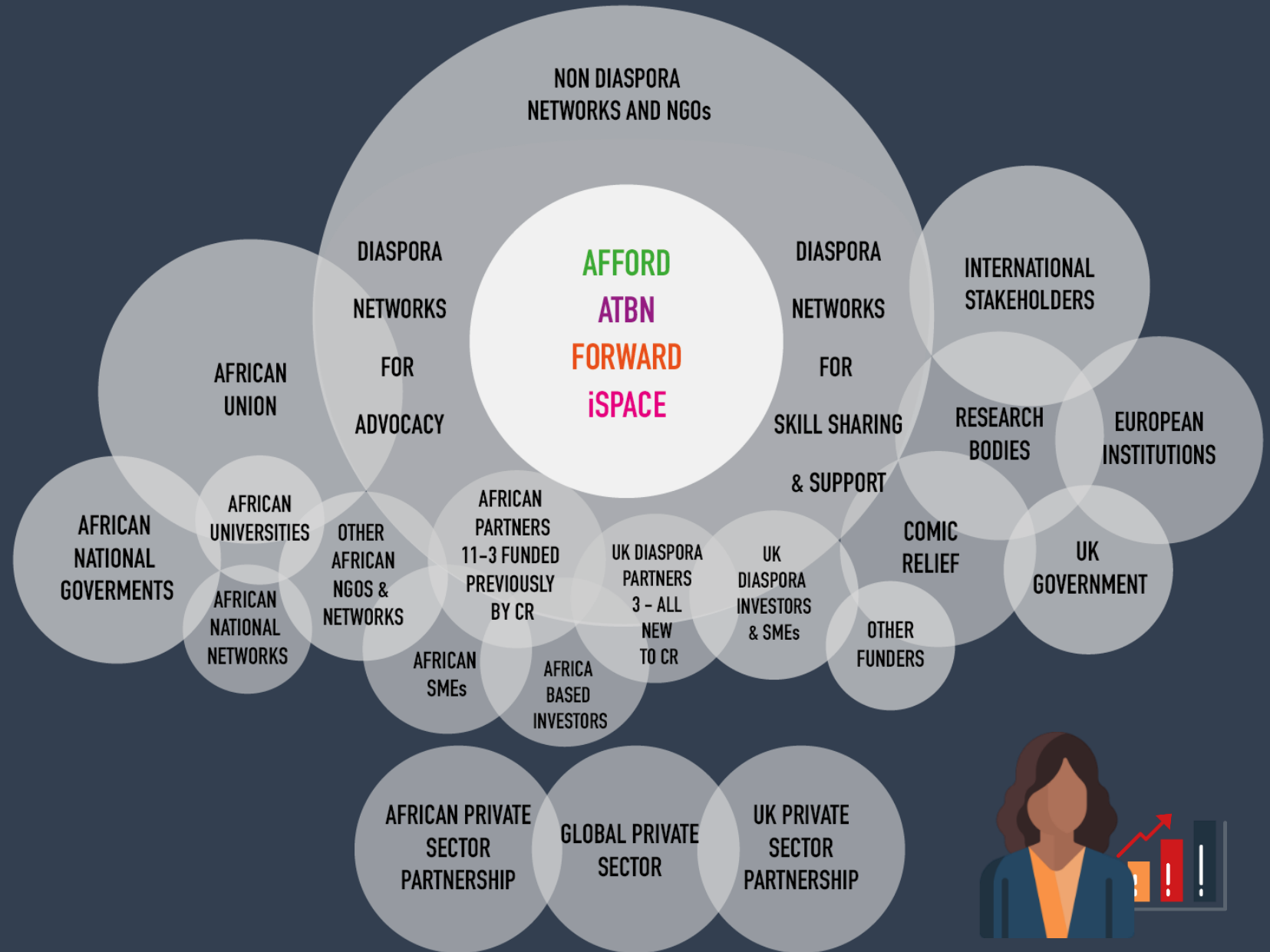
# LEARNING

## Eco-system of Diaspora delivery partners

The evaluation found that good diaspora organisations connect to a much wider range of groups and organisations that most development NGOs.

In this eco-system, the 'delivery partners' understand how the different parts contribute to system change and so invest time in building effective partnerships with and between them.

For example, AFFORD's work developed, extended and activated partnerships in a variety of spaces, creating new transnational networks between Africa and the UK and within Africa





## Distinctive contribution of effective UK small organisations

CGI II's UK Small and Diaspora fund conflated the contribution of small organisations with diaspora and thus often overlooked what makes each effective. The evaluation shows that two **sub-groups of small organisations** can be particularly effective:

- i) those that have a **strong niche**; and
- ii) **faith-based organisations** (and those with strong values).

Other more general **qualities** of effective small NGOs that are evidenced in the evaluation include:

- **Close relationships** with local partners that are respectful, listening, accessible and long-term.
- **Effective organisational strengthening**, accompanying partners and mutually agreeing priorities.
- **Agility**, responding to changing partner needs and contexts with **minimal bureaucracy**.

### Niche small organisations focus on particularly marginalised groups

**Project Harar** in a remote region of Ethiopia brought life-changing impact for children with cleft palate, believed to be 'cursed' and hidden away.



“An increasing body of evidence that faith-based organisations often demonstrate similar characteristics to diaspora organisations.”

## HOW FUNDERS SUPPORTED THAT DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION AND MANAGED RISK

### What went well

The evaluation demonstrated key strengths in CGI II's design in its distinct focus on a cohort, the **choice of strategic partners**, availability of **small research grants**, investment in **organisational development** and supporting partners to **tell their own stories**.

In addition, Comic Relief's **flexible and adaptive grant management** combined with rigour in monitoring, evaluation and learning meant that the programme **mitigated risk** well.

### What didn't work so well

Assessing small and diaspora organisations against their assumed qualities and strengthening the **system of report rating** would have improved this further.

CGI II's distinctive **identity diminished as it progressed**. Organisation development was less structured than the first phase and Comic Relief **lost opportunities for strategic engagement** with partners during and after the funding.

# LEARNING

# CONCLUSIONS

---

## What has taken root?

The evaluation evidences the **distinctive and unique contribution of effective diaspora organisations** and the overlapping advantages to **effective small UK organisations**. It emphasises the importance of assessing organisations against these qualities, rather than assuming they exist. It shows how to strengthen sustainability of approaches, moving away from service-delivery to systemic, research-based, problem-solving approaches. It also highlights the **importance of accompaniment, peer support** and adaptive, strategic funding relationships in strengthening **organisational resilience**.

In a context where these findings are particularly relevant because of reducing budgets, debates about sustainability and shifting power to the South – all amplified by Covid-19 – the evaluation provides realistic recommendations to funders for the way forward.

# CONCLUSIONS



# WAY FORWARD

---

## Implications for future work and support

The evaluation recommends that funders:



**Acknowledge and communicate data** about the contribution of effective diaspora organisations and their relevance to the current context; creating opportunities for strategic conversations; **strengthening diaspora representation in donor structures**; and recognising the value that small organisations can bring particularly in strengthening southern partners.



**Engage and convene**, maximising Comic Relief's 20+ years of work with diaspora organisations and evidenced impact to celebrate CGI II, **give a platform to partners** and connect them to other donors and networks; developing long-term more strategic co-designing relationships with key partners to maximise their contribution; and supporting more **peer learning initiatives**.



**Invest**: optimising the positive momentum of CGI II to sustain and scale up important work; **investing strategically in diaspora** organisations as part of funding initiatives; integrating other effective modes of partnership and funding into the **shifting power approach**; and building organisational strengthening and small research/consultation grants into programmes.



**Create an enabling environment**: developing a **clear strategy for diaspora work**, integrating it into policy processes and removing barriers to investment; supporting research; **influencing UK Development Financial Institutions** to partner in diaspora investment and social enterprise schemes; and influencing platforms to raise awareness of diaspora contribution.

way forward



# Credits

## Reviewers

This review of CGI II was conducted by  
**Cathy James** and **Isabel Turner**  
on behalf of Comic Relief in 2020.

## Our thanks go to the Comic Relief Evaluation Team:

Benedict Beth  
Senior Investment Partner

Tom Colborne  
Partnership Manager FCDO

Giancarlo Angelucci  
Evaluation and Learning Manager

and  
Adam Pickering  
Senior Policy Advisor - FCDO

**Design:** Giancarlo Angelucci - Icons courtesy of flaticon.com

## A big thank you to all our partners:

ACE Africa	KwaAfrica (ex AFRICARE)
Africa Technology Business Network (ATBN)	Lifebrooks International
African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)	Lifeline Network International
African Future Development	Make Every Woman Count
Amos Trust	Malawi Fruits
Black South West Network	Mifumi
Chance for Childhood	Pan African Development Education and Advocacy Programme
Chemin Neuf Community	Pragya
CODA International (close)	Project Harar
Community Development Initiatives	Pump Aid
Community InfoSource	SEED Madagascar (was Azafady)
Consortium for Street Children	Signal
DeafKidz International	Students for Malawi
Diaspora for African Development	SUNARMA UK
Emerge Poverty Free	Support and Love Via Education International
Exeter Ethiopia Link	Team Kenya
Farmers Overseas Action Group	The Cecily Eastwood Zambian AIDS Orphans Appeal
FORWARD	The Gaia Foundation
Global One 2015	Transform Africa
Grassroots Action (formerly Powerful Information)	Trust for Africa's Orphans
Himilo Relief and Development Association	Women and Children First UK
Iftiin Education and Development Association	Women4Resources
International Children's Trust	YES! Tanzania
iSpace Foundation	

