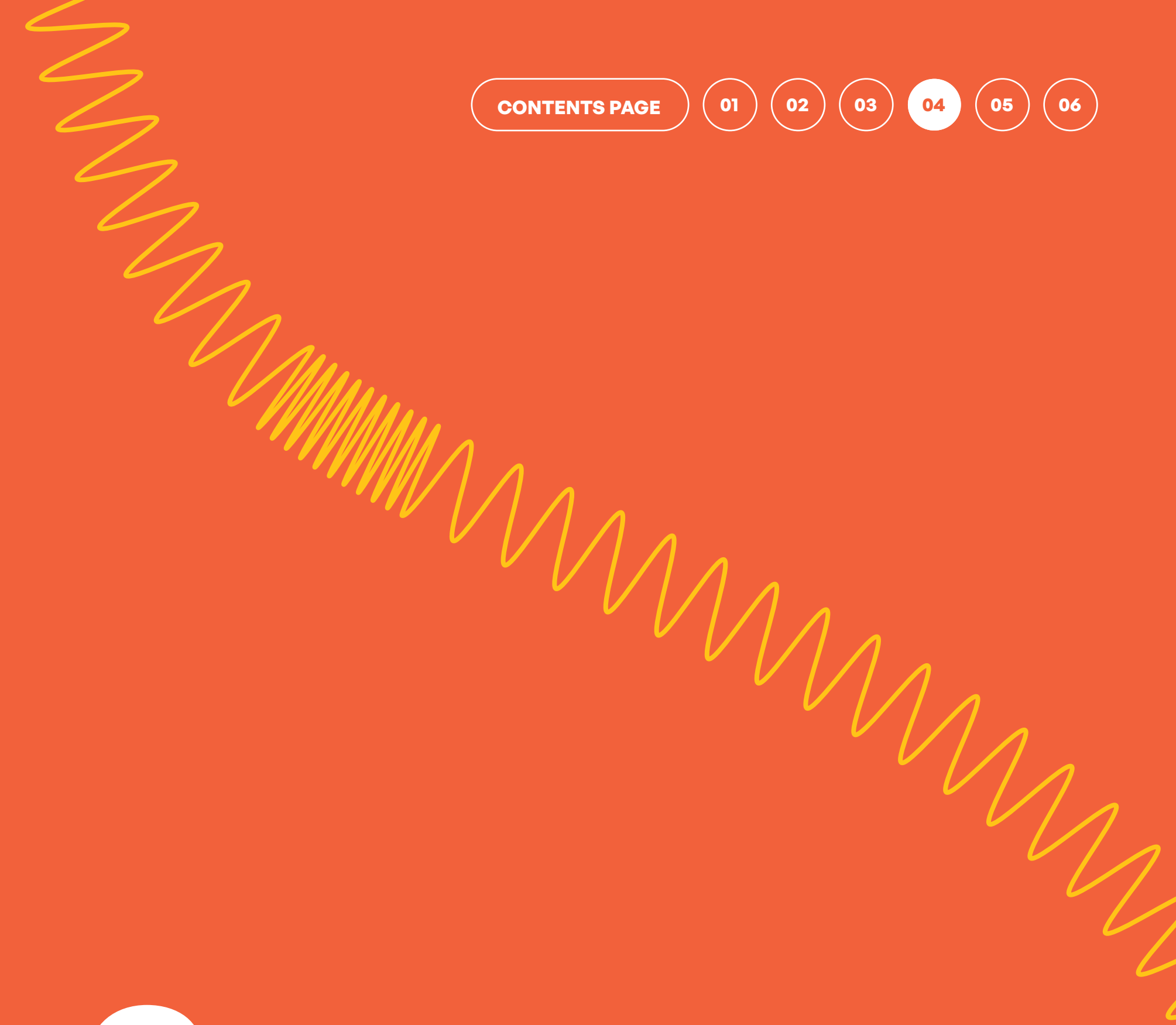Chapter 4
How should we measure success?

"The story must be about a balanced will between the original content and the latest versions."

– Denis Muwanguzi, Co-Founder and Director of Programs at Budondo Intercultural Centre

"Youth of Color have decision-making power over our grantmaking."

– Josefina Casati, Senior Director of Communications at Grantmakers for Girls of Color

"By putting the voices of the communities we serve at the forefront, we are able to show the impact of our work beyond the numbers"

– Denis Koech, Senior Communications Coordinator at Farm Input Promotions Africa

How can we tell more respectful stories while meeting organizational goals?

Communicators in the global development and social impact sectors are often tasked with meeting specific organizational objectives, whether that's demonstrating a program's effectiveness to meet reporting requirements or supporting fundraising campaigns. But those priorities are often at odds with what communities experience on the ground – and with their own vision for change.

Is it possible to tell respectful stories while also meeting organizational goals? How can organizations honor the experience of communities throughout the monitoring and evaluation process? Are those priorities fundamentally at odds with each other?

To tackle this topic, we've sought the viewpoints from three social impact practitioners who work in close collaboration with communities to tell stories of change.

Josefina Casati is the Senior Director of Communications at Grantmakers for Girls of Color, an intermediary grantmaking organization with an explicit focus on girls, femmes and gender-expansive youth of Color in the U.S. and territories.

Denis Koech is Senior Communications Coordinator at Farm Input Promotions Africa, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the food security of small-holder farmers in Kenya and **Denis Muwanguzi** is the Co-Founder and Director of Programs at Budondo Intercultural Centre, a non-profit organization that provides affordable health services and works to improve livelihoods in rural Uganda. He is the former Learning and Impact lead at Mama Hope, a nonprofit that supports the work of 13 community-based organizations in East and West Africa, and in Central America.

Together, they make the case for redefining the sector's definition of success, and argue that centering the voices of communities in storytelling ultimately leads to better outcomes for all.

For more on how this toolkit and its chapters came to life, head to the introduction, where you'll find information about our process of engaging with community members, international development professionals, and communications experts.

Note: We've included quotes from community members who took part in consultative workshops held in 2022 in the lead-up to this toolkit. The workshops were held anonymously so that participants could express their views more freely. Their names have been kept hidden throughout this toolkit.
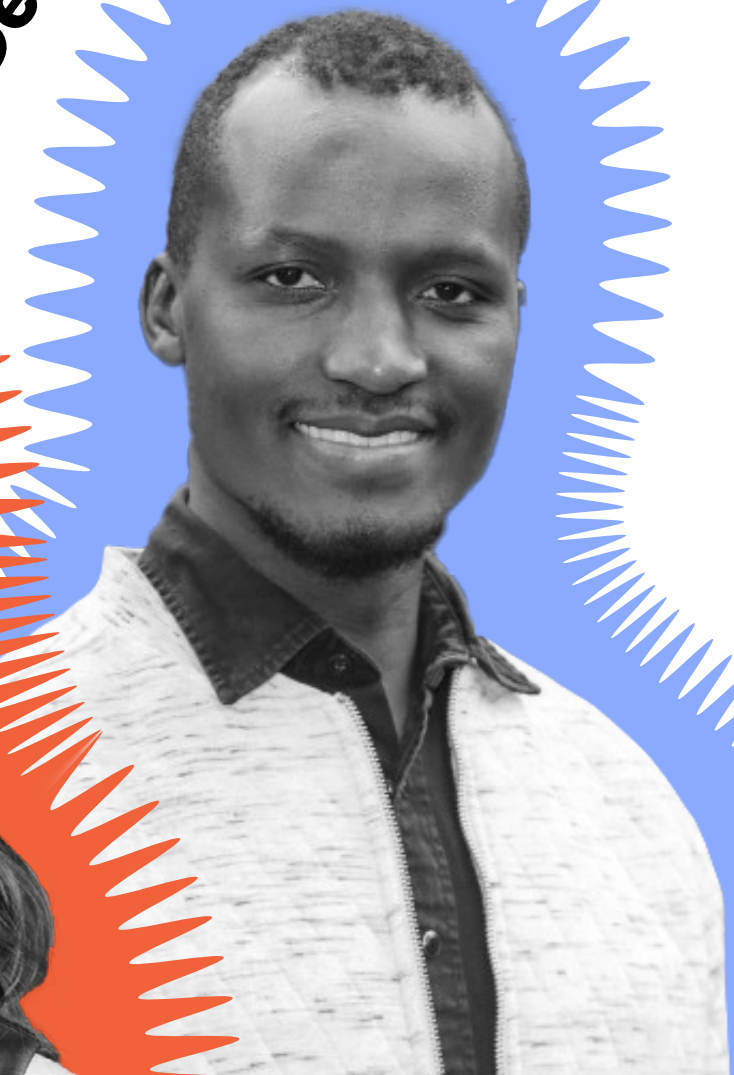

Denis Koech

Josefina Casati

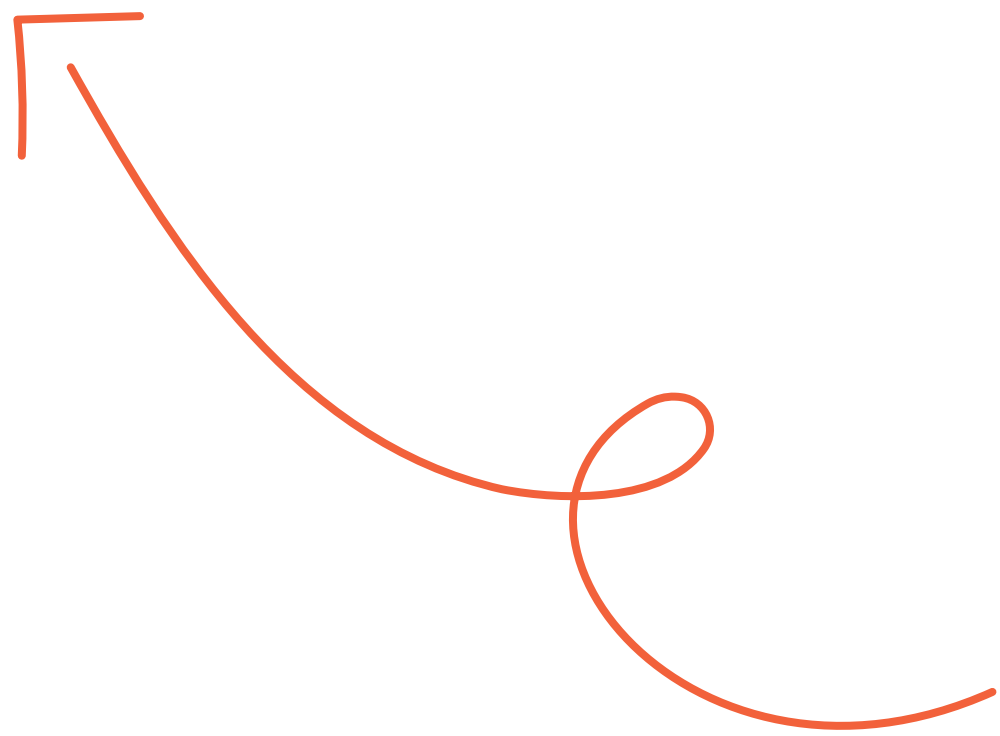Denis Muwanguzi

"As storytellers, it is our job to ensure that our stories center around the needs of communities."

One of the most common stories we tell in the global development sector is the story of impact. We have a duty to share with our funders, and with the wider public, accounts of how successful our programs have been in the communities we partner with.

But when measuring success and telling the story of impact, many of us find ourselves caught between different needs. The general audience would like to see how the community was supported; the donor needs to see that their funds were spent as intended; and the organization wants to build credibility and attract more funding. With all these competing priorities, it is easy to lose sight of what actually matters: ensuring that the community or individual feels that success is being achieved on their own terms.

As storytellers, it is our job to ensure that our narratives center around the needs of these communities. Our contributors argue that the funding and the support should follow that, rather than the other way around.

This chapter explores how defining and measuring success in global development requires, first and foremost, a deep understanding of the communities the sector exists to support.

In the first section we begin by questioning the way we have historically measured success in the global development sector, and discuss how funding requirements sometimes conflict with the process of telling stories respectfully.

In the second section, we provide learnings and practical tools to help us all take the next step on our journey to changing how we measure success.

Section 1: **Should we change how we measure success?**

From whose point of view are we measuring success?

The global development sector is largely white-led, by people who are not part of the communities. When it comes to measuring success, it's easy to default to historical processes of measurement that have been defined by donor organizations, without consulting those directly impacted to understand what true success means to them.

Some of these processes of measurement tend to:

- Rely primarily on the written word.

- Emphasize statistics and numbers over human impact, stories, and conversations.

- Be based on the belief that progress is determined by growth (bigger, more.)

Communities face several challenges with these methods of reporting. For example, those who are used to expressing success orally or visually are required to fill out reports, reducing the expanse of their experience to a few pages.

Too often the full community perspective is not respected before success is measured as well, and this ultimately affects how successful a project can be.

If a project can't scale, it is often ineligible for further funding, even when scale may not be what a given community or project needs to be successful.

Click here to read more from those with lived experience about how the focus on scaling often excludes African Innovators.

Additionally, there is little room for complexity or nuance, and therefore little room for experimentation and for the risk of dreaming big when it comes to project creation and implementation. Your project is either successful or not; it fits in this box, or it doesn't. As a result, organizations are engaged in constant numbers-driven reporting to donors and funders to attempt to fit into the necessary box.

Thus success is currently measured through the funder or donor lens while the partners are forced to adjust and compromise, but by involving communities affected from the start till the end we can change how 'success' is understood.

This is especially important because when communities face challenges such as crises, pandemics, and floods, they have lived experience in such challenges, and can provide working solutions. All they need are resources to enable them to implement the solutions they have. This applies in storytelling as well, and it is beneficial to create space for the communities to retain their power to tell their stories in their own words. When we do this, the perspective is more authentic.

Our work is ultimately about supporting them in creating a better life. As the ones affected, they know best if the program was effective, and can use their stories to convey this or to build future learnings.

Reflection Prompts

- Might your organization's approach to measurement be shaped by a western gaze?

- Does it prioritize quantitative measures at the expense of qualitative ones? Are complex human issues and experiences reduced to single and simple numbers?

- Is the judgment of the communities involved a factor in how success is measured?

- If not, how might you introduce new forms of measurement to decision-makers?

"The way he was also describing – I don't know if it's funding technique or what – but he was describing Mlali as a horrible place. That's not how we like the community to be portrayed. Somebody who hasn't visited Mlali would have a completely different picture. For me, the community is excellent, we've got excellent people, we've got brilliant kids with so much potential. I don't view it as people are poor. Just that they're limited with resources. The kids are limited with their opportunities to attend nice schools. People are limited with opportunities to get quality education. That's all. But if they're given the opportunity, they could be anybody. They'd be the best!"

– Dr. Kiliness Sekwiha, Founder and Director of Queen Elizabeth Academy.

How do we balance numbers with human impact?

For instance, does it make sense to tell a story about 2.5 million people having access to services? It might appeal to the narrative your audience is used to hearing – that large-scale interventions are inherently successful. But what if the community you're working to support doesn't need access for 2.5 million people? What if they need in-depth and long-term support for a group of 1000? Sharing a story about 2.5 million people having access to services also says nothing about whether the services were actually accessed, or whether the services are providing transformational impact.

"I would like support to develop an M&E framework that works for us and our integrated approach. What is recommended is the numbers of people. We are human beings and not just numbers"
– Ingrid Vilsenor, Founder and CEO of Tejiendo Futuros, Guatemala.

The value of impact numbers is not to be downplayed, but it cannot be the only major measure of success. This is where the power of storytelling as a reporting technique truly shines, and where it makes sense to allow for more authentic connection between the audience and the story.

Storytelling can enrich the reporting process by providing a behind-the-scenes look at interventions, and giving quantitative data a second life. By combining data and the voice of the storyteller, stories expound on outcomes and impact to provide more holistic and nuanced learnings.

Some organizations have enhanced the way they report impact by supplementing raw numbers with thoughtful storytelling .

This approach requires a significant investment in time spent in communities to listen to program participants narrate their experiences of program activities. Here, they can talk about shifts in quality of life, services accessed, household income and the ripple effect of project activities and outputs, in a way that prioritizes their lived experience.

> "**Storytellers** have a vital role to play in spreading positivity, changing what people hear and **changing realities.**"
> – Interview Participant in response to questions on the impact of stories told by the sector, conducted by BRAC (Bangladesh) in 2022 on behalf of MCSWS for this toolkit.

One organization that has done this well is the Future Economy Lab with their program: Abundantly Investing in Girls of Color, a project of Grantmakers for Girls of Color and SecondMuse Capital LLC. Their work engages the wisdom of girls of color ages 13 to 24, to envision a just and inclusive economy.

When given a proper opportunity, these girls offer a perspective that is authentic to their experiences, and in turn put forward more nuanced effective solutions.

Another example comes from A community leader in Mlali, Tanzania. He reported that measuring the impact of investments in communities is multilayered, and that any stories told should reflect that.

He described, for instance, the impact of the community school Queen Elizabeth Academy within their neighborhood beyond the valuable education accessed by children attending the school.

The diagram he used illustrated how financial capital flew from the school into the hands of construction workers, teachers and support staff, to families surrounding the school ecosystem.
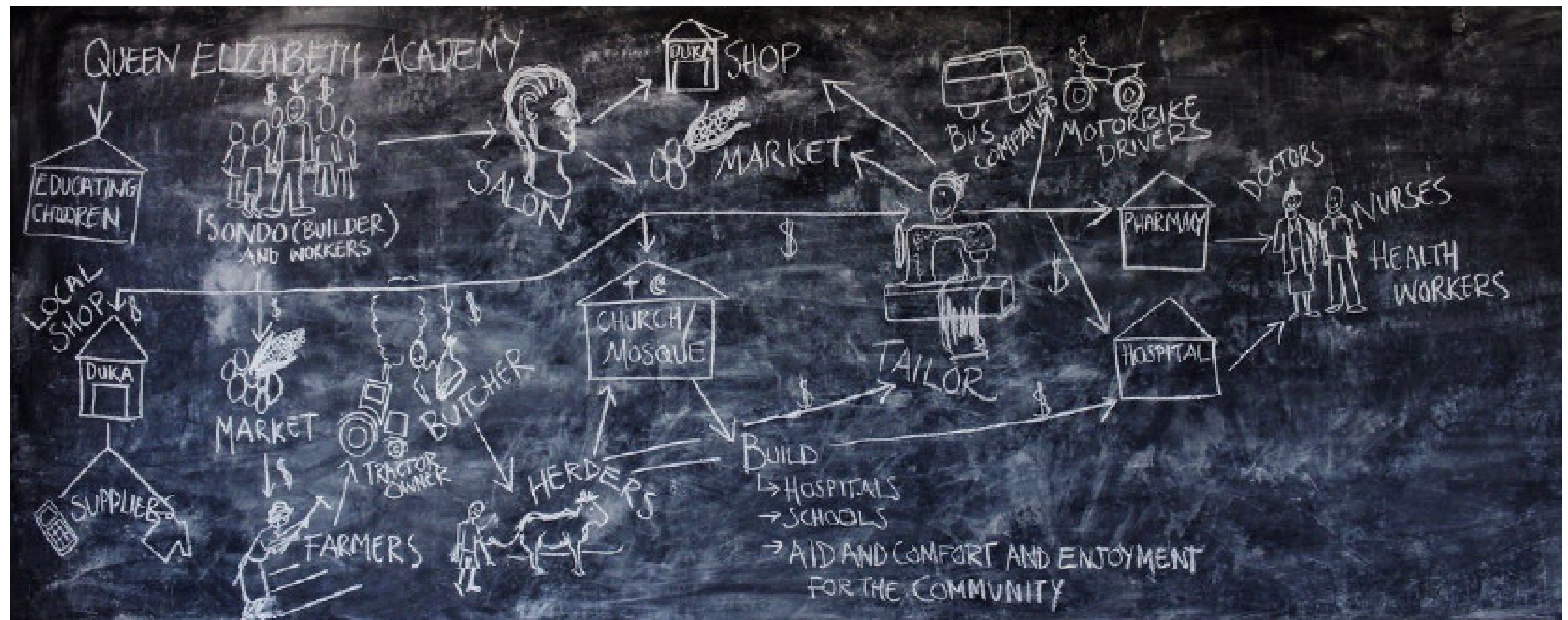
Caption: A flow chart illustrating financial capital flow within Mlali Community through funding and investments in Queen Elizabeth Academy.

"I believe it is time actors in the philanthropy world shifted from basic reporting to reporting that fully incorporates ethical storytelling. Data is important but ethical storytelling brings out the bigger picture behind an intervention.

By putting the voices of the communities we serve at the forefront, we are able to show the impact of our work beyond the numbers we reach. Storytelling also helps us to gain more insight into the needs of the communities we serve and hence adapt our interventions to their changing lives and needs."

– Denis Koech, Senior Communications Coordinator at Farm Input Promotions Africa

Donor comes into community

Manager

Emotions: 😊 😐 😟
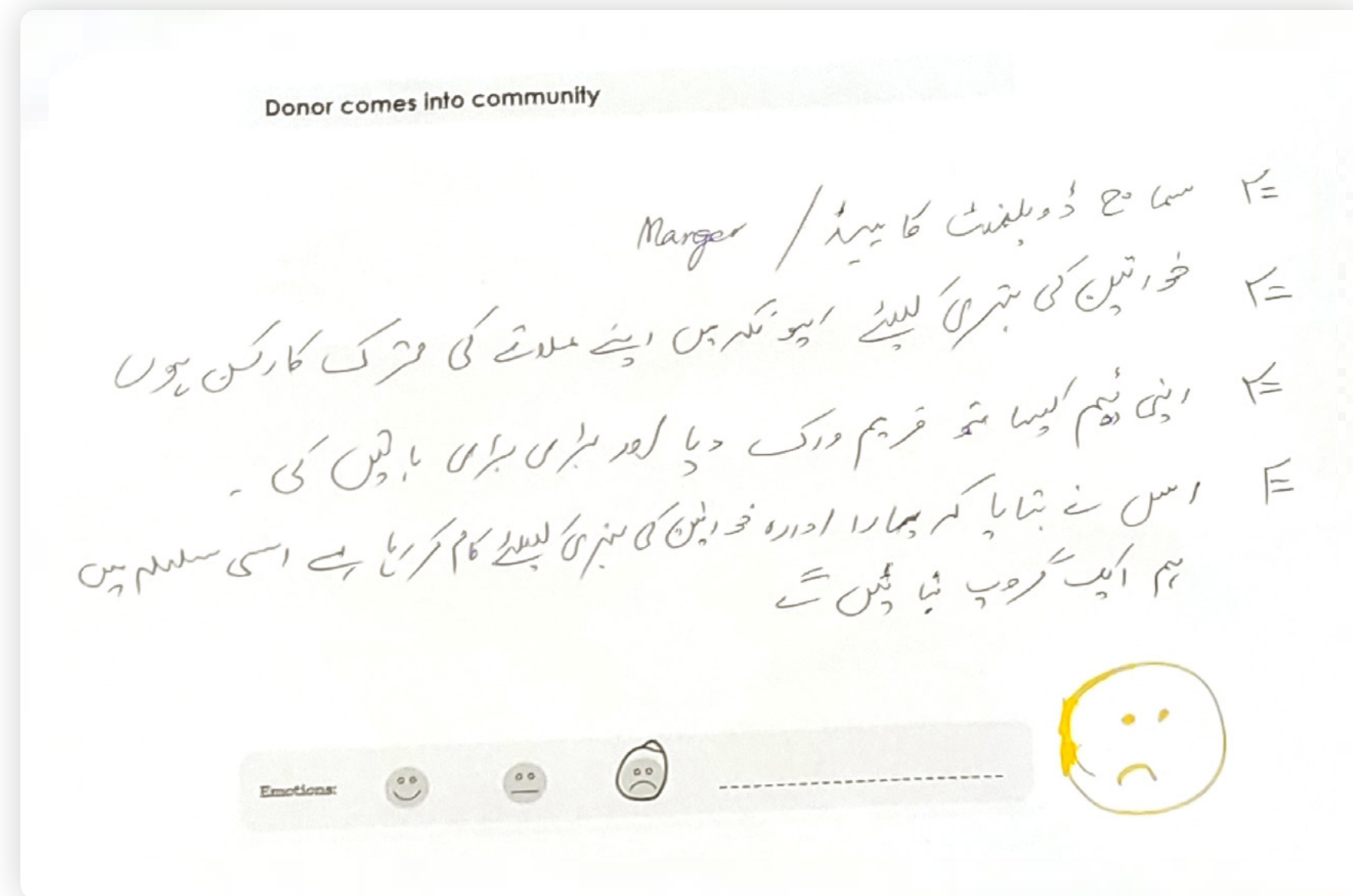
"To be honest, most of these organizations portray more than what they actually achieve": Workshop participant in response to a journey mapping exercise, conducted by ICARUS (Pakistan) in 2022 on behalf of MCSWS for this toolkit.

"At [Queen Elizabeth Academy] we're dealing with children from three to 14-15 and they've got different needs, and you have to face all of those. So you realize you need every kind of support – education, health, psychological help. We had some kids without parents, they would come to school, they're not happy. For a kid to be successful in education, it's a combination of other areas to be successful as well. At [a] family level, at [an] individual level."

– Dr. Kiliness Sekwiha, Founder and Director of Queen Elizabeth Academy

How can we balance the importance of short-term and long-term success?

Current measurement processes tend to overemphasize short-term impact, even if the program hasn't come to fruition yet, or might change course. But this comes at the expense of building trust with communities and local partners, who see their priorities for long-term change being overshadowed by the need to demonstrate short-term success to donors. While prioritizing the organization's achievement might fulfill donor requirements in the short term, this can ultimately harm relationships with communities, and jeopardize the sustainability of programs.

Reflection Prompts

Is the pressure to demonstrate short-term success on a project causing your organization to de-prioritize longer term outcomes?

While measuring the short-term impact of programs is key, what if measurement went a step further? What if we moved towards sharing not just what has worked, but also what is in progress and what communities and teams hope to see?

Those organizations that have chosen to honor their relationships with communities in their communications have put processes into place to make sure their commitment is upheld at all times.

In practice, these approaches are beneficial because they enable program and communications teams to:

- **Make communications choices that prioritize the long-term goal**, even if it affects the short-term engagement when possible. For example, at Mama Hope, we stopped using images of children. This decreased engagement on social media in the short term, but gave us an opportunity to draw attention to an issue, and use it to advocate for our mission.

- **Update their mission and brand identity to account for the long-term.** If they have values that reflect the organization's goals, they can try and change processes to make sure our long-term vision isn't hindered for the short term.

Section 2: **Practical steps to change how we measure success**

Bringing donors on the journey with us

At Mama Hope, we firmly believe that the right donors will want to do the right thing, and that part of our job is sharing knowledge on how to do that. Our donors and funders deserve more credit. It's no understatement to say that many of them are also tired of the same old stories of pity and need.

If you want to do this too, it is essential to create a work environment that invites donors to be part of the conversation around change.

Also, encourage your teams to be creative in exploring how to express to donors that there are more ethical and effective ways of doing things, and create space for these learnings to be shared.

Grantmakers for Girls of Color is an example of an intermediary grantmaking organization that thrives on ethical processes and storytelling:

"At Grantmakers for Girls of Color (G4GC), we strive to create a philanthropic home for girls, femmes, gender-expansive youth of color under age 25 who are traditionally excluded from the sector. We recognize that, despite the challenges they face living at the intersection of sexism, racism and other forms of oppression, they are courageous leaders at the forefront of transformative organizing work.

They are influencing movements and efforts to achieve social justice, gender justice, climate justice, and economic justice. We recognize their brilliance and leadership, and are committed to listening to their wisdom, and to following their leadership. Youth of Color have decision-making power over our grantmaking, and they inform our policies, strategies, and communication platforms which makes our work more effective and impactful."

– Josefina Casati, Senior Director of Communications at Grantmakers for Girls of Color

How to shift towards a more ethical vision of success: Bringing donors with us.

- **Emphasize quality.** Help donors to reflect – do they really only care if more and more people are being supported each year, or do they actually care about the quality of that support? Do they really believe an organization is only successful if its numbers are growing each year?

- **Set expectations early on.** This helps create meaningful conversations around changing priorities. Global Advocates at Mama Hope are encouraged to share with donors from the beginning that although they are fundraising for one particular project, priorities often change in real time.

- **Include stories and videos in meeting sessions or reports.** This helps humanize impact and build the culture around curiosity and funder engagement. They can see the faces behind the numbers, and the stories behind the program.

- **Create space for their contributions internally.** Consider opportunities for decision-making power within the organization by the community being served. It can be a listening session, or a board seat. The goal to have their insights and wisdom influence the projects or outcomes is core.

- **Make switching to more ethical practices part of your overall mission.** If your mission leans into ethical practices, then it's easier to direct resources toward that goal. And it can bring new audiences in, because they'll understand and appreciate your stance.

"**We have the opportunity to lead the donors, we can lead from the front. As communication experts, we are enablers and amplifiers for people, we can do more. We can amplify their voices so they can become and do more.**"

– Levis Nderitu, Director of Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at PATH.

Bridge silos between comms and program teams

In most cases, there is a gap between communications and program teams in facilitating storytelling. They both have their own goals and processes. This can affect the success of both of their aims, because they may unintentionally intervene with each other. For example, the communications team may come in without an understanding of the program's work or environment, or the program team may not understand the role of the communications team. But when you bring them together, you can create a more ethical and fluid process.

How to shift towards a more ethical vision of success: Bridging silos.

- **Hire local communications staff.** This creates a more sustainable way of working by having staff closer to the programs team.

- **Include budget lines to gather feedback.** Have budgets that allow for program teams and members of whatever community you are working in to be part of the content collection and even the production process.

- **Create updated or new internal processes.** Frontline and content-gathering staff need to understand what communications, marketing and fundraising staff need, and vice versa. There should be open and transparent communication so that all teams are aware of each other's goals, and can find a way to mutually achieve them. This might mean setting up regular meetings or other processes that facilitate collaboration. This is a win- win situation, as collaborative teams tend to produce better program and communications work.
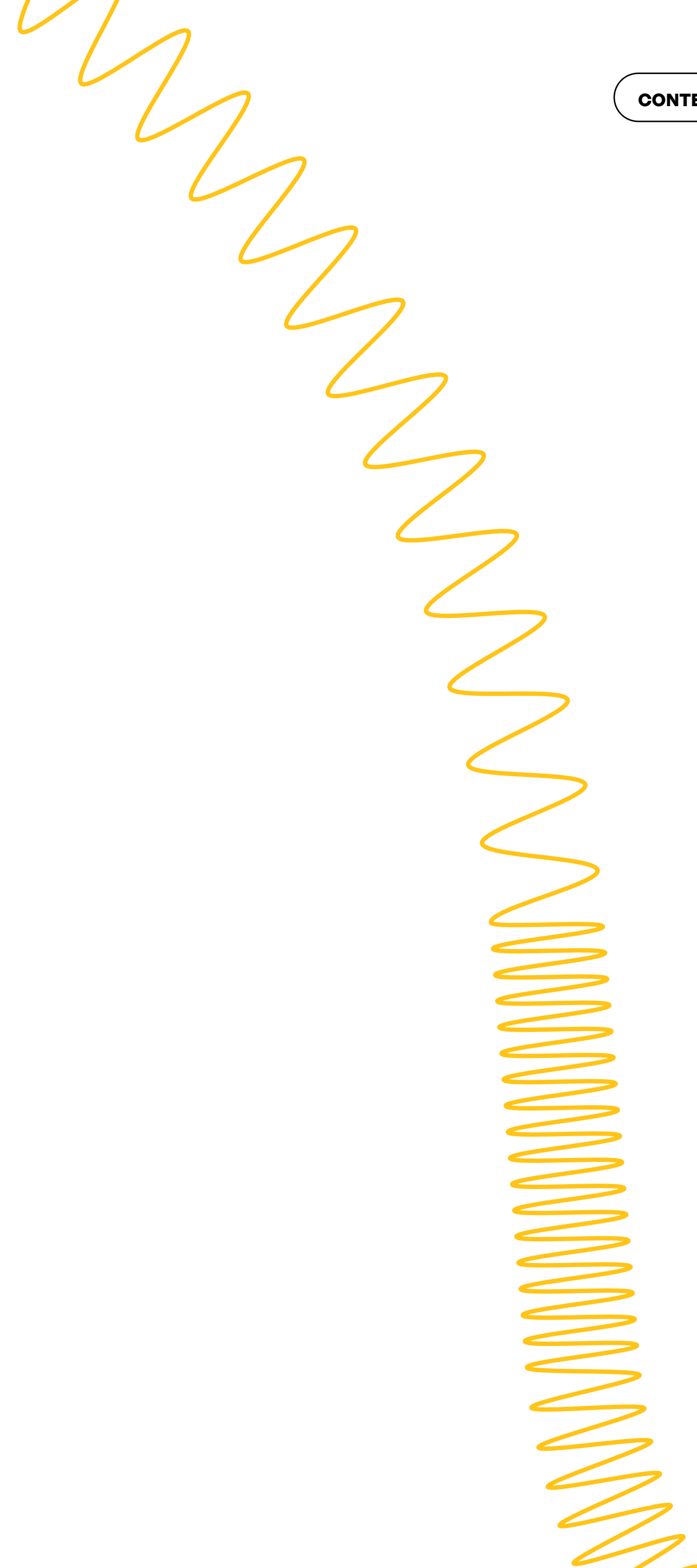
"Our communications team is in <u>very close dialogue</u> with our programs team. There's never a handoff to the comms team or a handoff to the programs team--instead they are communicating together with our grantees and partners about <u>how they want to be represented</u>. We also have processes in place where grantees can offer feedback, raise concerns, ask questions, or offer suggestions about how we represent and share their work. <u>Consent and agency are important values</u> to us in this process."

– Maheen Kaleem, Vice President of Operations and Programs, Grantmakers for Girls of Color.

Ensure community perspective is at the heart of how you measure and portray success.

Because the whole purpose of the work and communications for it is to uplift and collaborate with those in communities, if we do not take their view as a defining factor of success, we lose the reason behind it all. When it is their stories, their home, their friends, and family that we talk about, how could we not have their point of view throughout to guide us?

"I find storytelling resonates with me a whole lot if I have been a part of its journey to publication. From co-creating the information about the impact in my community, editing and fine-tuning, to publication and launch. What I'm aware of is that each of the steps provides opportunities for either information authenticity or distortion. The story must be about a balanced will between the original content and the latest versions, understandable by the final reader. I think that what is often missed is that the storyteller is a reader too at the end, and a simple way for me to tell if the process was participatory is when I, as a story owner, recognize the origins of any line in a story."

– Denis Muwanguzi, Co-Founder of Budondo Intercultural Centre

How to shift towards a more ethical vision of success: Bringing in community perspective.

As we've discussed, the way we measure success should include the community voice as they are at the heart of the story and program experience. Below we've included a measurement framework your organization can use and adapt that helps you quantify ways of measuring success from the community perspective. Through this, we can start to collect qualitative and quantitative data that can be integrated into our overall understanding of the effectiveness of our communications and programs.

Raquel Thomas
Operations Associate at Grantmakers for Girls of Color.

⟶ **Click here** to watch Josefina Casati (Senior Director of Communications at Grantmakers for Girls of Color) interview Raquel Thomas (Operations Associate at Grantmakers for Girls of Color).

How to avoid misrepresentation and bring in the community voice when storytelling.

To see the interview in full, **click here**.

Case Study:
The Women of Nyamonge Present: Netball

This video came about when Mama Hope was working with a community in Western Kenya. We asked them "What is the story you want to tell?" They said they wanted to share about Netball, so that is what we did. This supported our Stop the Pity campaign in the sense that it broke away from the stereotype of the poor African women, and showcased this community as full and multifaceted. The Stop the Pity campaign launched Mama Hope to international notoriety. It has won a number of awards, as well as attracting a significant amount of donations and long-term, major donors.

Create a sustainable bond with those whose stories you are telling.

- **Stay for tea.** Take more time to understand and learn the stories of those whom you worked with, and are being represented. "Staying for tea" lets stories unfold organically, and can lead to a more holistic and true vision of success.

  Click here to learn about the five principles of "Staying for tea."

- **Prioritize immersion trips.** We should meet the people we are sharing stories about. One-hour, once-yearly site visits aren't likely to create trust, space or the time for the human impact of any intervention to become apparent.

Written by Carolyn, Josephin, Nelly, Lynet and the Mama Hope team. Directed, shot, and edited by Bryce Yukio Adolphson

An example measurement framework to bring community perspective into practice

Example Measurement Framework				
Inputs	**Outputs**	**Outtakes**	**Outcomes**	**Impact**
Community engagement throughout storytelling process	**Which stories are told and how they're told**	**Community satisfaction with storytelling process & outputs**	**How stories are used to shape program activity**	**Long-term trust and community involvement in programs**
% of people who feel they provided informed consent	Breadth of types of stories told by the organization	% of community members who feel accurately represented	No. of community members who were consulted on program goals / activity	The community feels the project was successful
% of people who feel they were fairly compensated	% of stories in which communities share advice	% of people who feel comms represent their community well	% who agree stories they share are providing insights to inform programming	The community feels motivated to continue to engage with the organization / program
% of people consulted on which stories were told	% of stories where communities are shown to be shaping solutions	% of people who feel the story is true to how they wanted it told	No. of community members who have received program support	No. of community members who recall change in funding due to their feedback
% of people who had full understanding of how their story would be used	% of stories in which community voices are heard / amplified	% of people who were asked for ongoing feedback on communications	No. of people who are satisfied with the program support received	No. of community members who recall change in programmes due their feedback
% of people who had the chance to feed back on final communication materials	% of stories which feature the organization's vs the community's role		No. of community members who received access to relevant services	% of community members who trust organization to tell their story
				% who feel the program has made a meaningful impact to their community / life

As we've discussed, the way we measure success should include the community voice as they are at the heart of the story and program experience. Above we've included a measurement framework your organization can use and adapt that helps you quantify ways of measuring success from the community perspective. Through this, we can start to collect qualitative and quantitative data that can be integrated into our overall understanding of the effectiveness of our communications and programs.

Conclusion

Storytelling is part of improving how we measure success, it can <u>encourage a shift in vantage point</u> so that people and communities end up determining what success looks like, <u>on their own terms</u>. Rather than bending to the demands of donors and funders, it is beneficial to amplify the voices and the requests of those being served.

In addition, it is necessary to involve donors and supporters in the conversation about the shift by sharing the reasons, broadening understanding, and inviting deeper questions.

The funders who are open to change and want to engage more thoroughly are the ones who are going to support you more effectively in the long run. Changing approaches in this way is rarely easy, but in the long run it is likely to be a positive experience for everyone involved. It helps capture more authentic narratives, deepen relationships, and can help us all reach our <u>shared goal of supporting</u> communities effectively.