Reimagining Global Operating Models: Steps Multi-Country Organizations Are Taking to Advance Equity and Shift Power Locally

By Danielle Berfond, Chanda Jain, Jasleen Kaur, Thabo Matshego, Roger Thompson, Karishma Uberoi, and Donald Yeh

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Preface

We decided to write this report in response to a series of organizations that reached out to us in recent years about re-examining their cross-country operating models. As we spoke to them, we began to understand many were starting to make changes based on a shared motivation to recenter their operations around the communities they work in. They specifically hoped to shift more power and resources closer to those communities. And thus, we set out to interview more leaders, to learn from the experiences of different organizations and share what we heard.

Along the way, we heard feedback on the potential harm of highlighting the efforts of global organizations to shift their practices, which could take attention away from the need to fund local organizations and leaders. It risks simplifying or even glorifying incremental steps, rather than emphasizing the hard work that is needed to truly shift power after potentially decades of operating in a way that concentrated power. We wholeheartedly agree with the need to increase the flow of flexible funding to these proximate voices with the knowledge, experiences, relationships, and power to drive change in their own communities. At The Bridgespan Group, we are committed to work that highlights and seeks to address the vast disparities in funding to local organizations and movements (see, for example, *Disparities in Funding for African NGOs* and *Lighting the Way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements*).

Ultimately, we decided to publish this report because we believe both pathways to improvement are important—that significantly more funding should flow to local organizations and that global organizations should revisit their strategies and shift how they operate. Leaders shared with us a range of perspectives on the "ideal" role of global organizations, and most agreed that their roles should change—even diminish—as local organizations get more resourcing and power. Yet we also heard that global organizations are still needed in this moment and in the foreseeable future. There is a hope and belief that they can get better at the roles they do play by becoming more local themselves.

We hope you read this report while understanding that its scope, by design, is a response to the questions we've been asked about the operating models of organizations working across borders.

This report is not a how-to guide with best practices from exemplar organizations. We primarily engaged organizations working to change ingrained practices, and we can say that all of the organizations are continuing to learn and evolve. This is a synthesis of experiences shared by organizations whose journeys are still underway with potentially more work ahead of them than behind. While the ultimate outcomes cannot yet be judged, we can still learn much from their steps and missteps. Indeed, as an organization founded in the United States and operating across three continents, we at Bridgespan are on our own journey. We have our own limitations and seek to create our own changes internally. And we realize there may be some limitations we do not yet know of. We strive to continue learning alongside others.

Introduction

Global organizations are increasingly engaging in difficult conversations about shifting power and resourcing from capital-rich places like New York or London to local organizations and people, who hold a wealth of lived experience and cultural knowledge, along with deep relationships in communities. Some call this shift "localization." Others view it as "decolonizing" development. At the core, this is about yielding power to communities. And most agree that change, whatever it is called, has a long way to go.

One critical path to change is *increasing funding and power to local organizations.* These organizations have a deep understanding of the local context, credibility among local stakeholders, and a commitment to sustained local impact. Yet they remain on the margins when it comes to funding.[1] "Local actors still only directly receive about 3 percent of tracked international humanitarian funds (not including subgrants and subcontracts)," concluded a recent report.[2]

Criticism of this disparity drove bilateral and multilateral aid organizations as well as some philanthropies in recent years to pledge increased direct funding for "local" NGOs to demonstrate a commitment to shifting power and resources.[3] There is a growing, though still insufficient, focus on investing in funds that specifically direct resources to locally led organizations (e.g., the Equality Fund, Frida the Young Feminist Fund). Community voices are also increasingly coming together to demand and inform changes, such as NEAR, a movement of local and national civil society organizations, and #ShiftThePower, a movement of people and organizations working to tip the balance of power toward local voices.

To date, however, results have not lived up to good intentions.[4] And this is complicated by the varied definitions and spectrums of what "local" truly means. For example, NEAR defines criteria of "local organizations"; a Bridgespan analysis of philanthropy in Africa identified several different parameters highlighted by interviewees, though they often centered on where decision-making sits (see exhibit on page 5).

We believe it is integral that funding flows accelerate toward local organizations and the funds that support them. Yet organizations operating across borders continue to be important actors in the ecosystem. For these global organizations, an important path to change is *to examine the way they work* and shift power and resourcing closer to where on-the-ground impact happens. Many are asking about the best way to do so.

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1   Mosun Layode, Jan Schwier, Siya Hayi-Charters, Maddie Holland, and Soa Andria, *Disparities in Funding for African NGOs*, The Bridgespan Group, July 29, 2021.

2   Sabina Robillard, Teddy Atim, and Daniel Maxwell, *Localization: A "Landscape" Report*, Feinstein International Center, December 2021.

3   Administrator Power Lays Out Bold Vision For 'Agency For Inclusive Development,' Commits to Sweeping Equity and Accessibility Reforms, USAID, November 4, 2021.

4   *Time to Decolonise Aid: Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation*, Peace Direct, May 10, 2021.

While there is no singular definition of "African NGO," interviewees offered important parameters centering on where decision making sits

Questions to consider

- What is the identity of the founder?
- What is the identity of the leader?
- What is the level of African representation on the leadership team?

Leadership team

Board and governance

Questions to consider

- What is the level of African representation on the board?
- Where is the board based?
- Do local boards have true decision-making power?

Questions to consider

- Is the headquarters located in an African country?

Headquarters location

Decision-making 'locus of power'

Operating model and decision-making structures

Questions to consider

- To what extent are practices and processes shaped by the local context and culture?
- What decision-making authority is given to teams in Africa?

Questions to consider

- Does the organization seek community input on its initiatives?
- To what extent does the organization work in partnership with communities?
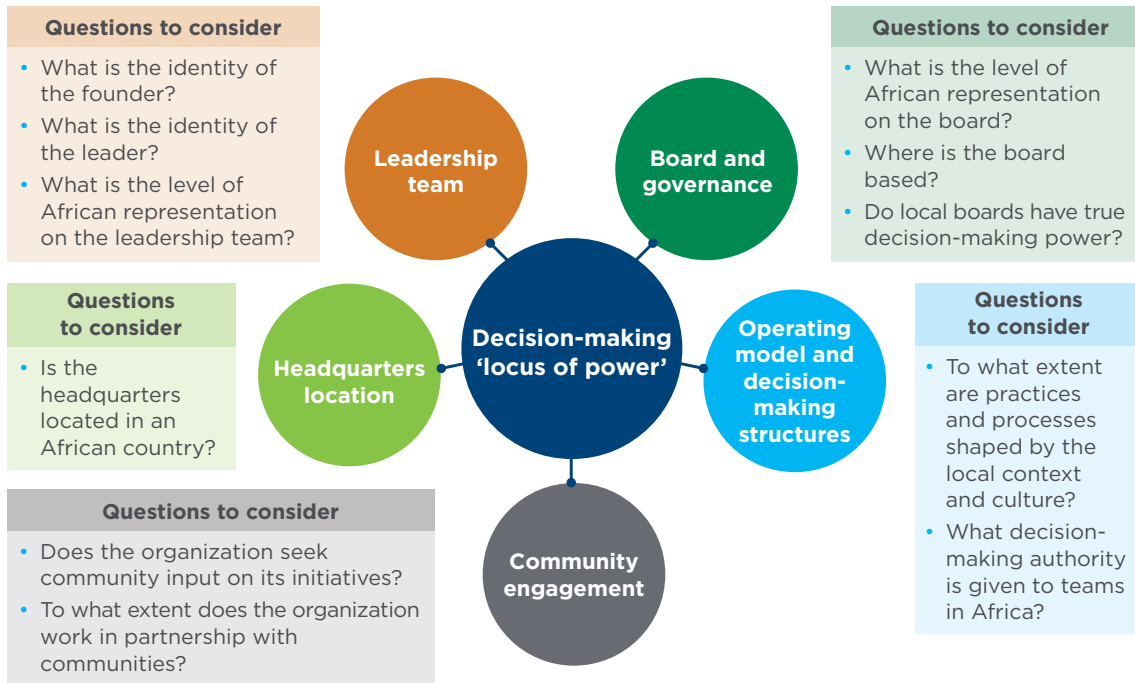
Community engagement

Source: Mosun Layode, Jan Schwier, Siya Hayi-Charters, Maddie Holland, and Soa Andria, *Disparities in Funding for African NGOs*, The Bridgespan Group, July 29, 2021.

As global organizations came to The Bridgespan Group in search of practical advice, we initiated a research project to better understand how their peers have taken steps to shift power and decision making and to report on what they are learning. We connected with current and former clients as well as with other organizations we knew were grappling with these questions. All expressed they were somewhere on a longer journey; they reflected on the complex and systemic nature of the problems they were hoping to address, and they acknowledged there were a lot more changes and hard work ahead of them. In total, we spoke with more than 70 individuals at 35 organizations, some large and well-established with operations in multiple countries, others relatively new and with small footprints (see the Appendix).[5] Most, but not all, have their origins in the Global North. To be sure, there are many other organizations on their own journeys that have had experiences we were not able to capture here. (We included NGOs as well as funders—but only in the sense of the global operations of funders whose origins reflect similar power dynamics. We do not address funding practices.)

What we heard first were a series of fundamental—even existential—questions about why they even have a global strategy. What is the value of operating across geographies? What impact do they seek to achieve? Could they accomplish more by elevating other actors already on the scene rather than doing the work themselves? In what ways are they

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5   The Bridgespan Group shares insights gleaned from our consulting projects and additional research for the benefit of the social sector. Some of the organizations or individuals described in this article may be current or former Bridgespan clients.

supporting or impeding the growth of local organizations? Do they risk unintended harm by competing with local organizations for talent and financial resources? In countries where they decide to work, when and in what circumstances should they exit?

There are some notable initiatives taking place to encourage and support global organizations that are reflecting on those kinds of questions, such as the Pledge for Change 2030, The RINGO Project: Re-Imagining the INGO and the Role of Global Civil Society, and the Coalition for Racial and Ethnic Equity in Development (CREED).

Organizations that reaffirm their commitment to global operations face another set of complicated questions, noted Degan Ali, CEO of **African Development Solutions**, known as **Adeso**. "There are power issues that happen between offices and headquarters. How are resources allocated? Who makes those decisions? If you are a country rep, do you have real authority over your budget?"

Ali also highlighted questions global organizations face around where to partner with local organizations, and how to do so with a true partnership mindset (as opposed to treating them essentially as "subcontractors"). "These are all issues coming up that organizations don't know how to manage," she explained. And they are the kinds of questions about an organization's global operating model that individually and collectively can either advance or hinder equity. (See "Reimagining Global Operating Models: Choice Points and Key Equity Considerations.")

For organizations that are truly serious about advancing equity in their global operating models, answering questions like these does not lead just to box-ticking exercises. Rather, it is part of an authentic desire to change, informed by deep reflection on the organization's legacy and what values will guide it moving forward. There is an openness to listening, learning, and making radical changes, including those prioritized by local voices. It will make some leaders uncomfortable.

Adding to this complexity, most of the philanthropic money that flows to the Global South still comes from the Global North, which tends to slow the transfer of power and resources to homegrown NGOs. Global organizations need to reckon with this reality, while also being mindful of the unintended consequences of making changes in their operating models (e.g., distorting labor markets when opening local offices).[6]

Most of the organizations we interviewed are early in their transformational journeys and have not yet fully defined their desired end state or assessed the impact of changes on local communities or on their organizations. The sector remains in learning mode, trying to understand whether changes in global organizations can achieve desired outcomes.

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6   Bhekinkosi Moyo and Kenny Imafidon, *Barriers to African Civil Society: Building the Sector's Capacity and Potential to Scale Up*, Clearview Research and Vodaphone Foundation, 2021.

Five Trends in Practice

Across our interviews, we found that, regardless of size, budgets, or how long they have been working on transformation, global organizations grapple with similar operational issues and seek to make similar shifts. We summarize below five trends in practice that attempt to address some issues around power, resources, and equity, and bring these to life through examples of organizations' experiences:

Redefine the role of the "center" to shift power to local teams

Move central roles closer to the work

Elevate local voices in decision making

Invest in global _and_ local equity capabilities

Build equitable employee experiences

We highlight these as thoughtful and interesting practices for organizations (not "best practices"). Also, while we highlight specific examples to bring each of the five trends to life, they are parts of more holistic changes that the organizations are attempting to make. It is important to note that focusing only on the operating model, and within it only on one or two practices, would not have the desired result, and could appear performative or exacerbate harm (e.g., giving representation to local leaders without truly giving them decision-making power).

We conclude with reflections and advice on change management offered by leaders of global organizations who are navigating these transitions.

Redefine the Role of the "Center" to Shift Power to Local Teams

The traditional structure of global nonprofits and funders features a headquarters office—"the center"—most often in North America or Western Europe. The center sets programmatic priorities and directs development work intended to benefit communities and individuals in the Global South. Today, a growing number of global organizations are reconsidering where activities and decisions sit. They seek a balance between the intended benefits of being global—including consistency and standards, coordination, and scale—and the importance of the local knowledge, experience, and cultural context local teams and leaders bring. Some are even flipping the script, asking which functions or roles should be "globalized" rather than asking which should be "localized."

As a result, many are redefining the role of the "center" in a way that shifts power over decision making and resources to local teams, with the goal of recognizing them as the primary drivers of impact. Centers, in turn, are thought of as service providers, coordinators, or centers of support or knowledge management, often with fewer staff. Their roles may vary if local teams in different regions or at different stages of development require different levels of support.

To shift activities and decisions locally, some global organizations are taking steps to form independent affiliates anew or out of existing country teams. While there can be benefits to these more locally led and governed organizations, the model is not a panacea: the brand and assets of their global organizations still give independent affiliates an advantage over the local NGOs who compete with them for resources.

Move decision making to local teams

Several organizations are experimenting with ways to shift more—and more significant—decision making to local teams, while recognizing it will take a lot of work to break out of legacy decision-making behaviors. Some use a "freedom-within-a-framework" model, which enables an organization to set guardrails or standards centrally while allowing for most of the decisions to happen locally. Such frameworks, when developed alongside local teams, can help clarify the decision-making authority of local teams.

For more than a decade, **Oxfam**, a confederation of 21 independent nongovernmental organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty, has been working to transition country offices into independent affiliates as it seeks to devolve where decision making and power lie. For instance, Oxfam India became an independent affiliate in 2008. CEO Amitabh Behar described the shift: "Post-2008, I report to my board, and we have our own annual plans, annual budgets, everything is done by us within the country. We have our own strategic plan, which is even independent of the confederation. We try to ensure that both speak to each other and are in broad alignment."

Ipas works across five continents to advance reproductive justice by expanding access to abortion and contraception. As it transforms into more of a network structure, it has shifted key decisions, like major funding approvals, from individuals based in its former headquarters in North Carolina to committees with representatives from local teams. These committees develop criteria for making decisions on specific allocations

transparently and fairly, with inclusion in mind. "We have moved some of the decision powers that were sitting in North Carolina and spread them across the regions. We will continue to learn from these experiences as we evolve our operational structure," said Pansi Katenga, global development director and former country director for Malawi.

At **Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team**, an international organization dedicated to humanitarian action and community development through open data, being decentralized is integral to the model of enabling communities to map themselves. "We need to think about the end goal," said Tyler Radford, former executive director. "Changing our organization is not an end goal in itself; rather, it is a means to get to what matters: more people being able to address locally relevant challenges through data. We need to keep reiterating that vision as we make changes, to ensure each change purposefully moves us toward that goal." The organization has been working to push decisions as close to the action as possible—from the global team to regional teams to the open data communities themselves, with relatively few programmatic decisions at the global level. Importantly, this included pushing goal setting from a central office to regions, a shift that ensures the people with the greatest awareness of the most important issues are the ones setting priorities. As they work through the operational implications of this shift, they continue to reflect on how to manage the complexity of a diverse portfolio.

"When you set goals from the global (office) level, it's perhaps simpler," said Radford. "You can say, 'Okay, these are the single set of things we want to accomplish.' However, this comes at the expense of doing things that are truly meaningful in each locality. What we're seeing now is each region comes up with a completely different set of needs and programs to address those needs."

"For example," he continued, "our team in Asia Pacific is running a women's leadership development program to support the development of 100 young women in mapping and geospatial technology. In West Africa, we're partnering to map water and sanitation issues, and we're implementing field projects around that. Each region is homing in on the needs and priorities that matter locally. That's a tension in decentralizing—how do we manage, monitor, and communicate our impact globally? Do we need to have similar programs across the regions? And if so, what level of cohesion is the right level to have?"

As global organizations decentralize, they also need to define and document decision-making roles. **Living Goods**, which supports digitally empowered community health workers across Africa, has used a decision-making tool to make explicit how decision-making power has been decentralized. For the organization's steering committees, the tool "brings out clarity and empowerment for the teams to know what decisions are made where," said David Ssegawa, the organization's former global chief people and culture officer. "We've also ended up with a delegation of authority to the extent that we are very clear about which decisions are made by the countries, and which decisions are made by

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>
> **PANSI KATENGA, GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR AND FORMER COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR MALAWI, IPAS**

the global functions." Uganda Country Director Christine Namayanja has experienced the shift first-hand. "I'm happy to have joined when this journey is actually taking momentum and seeing it in practice," she said. "When I joined, you would hear staff saying, 'we could not make decisions before,' but now we are deliberate as leadership."

Build operational capabilities within local teams

Some organizations are investing in building the operational capabilities of local teams (e.g., finance, HR, communications), either by recruiting new talent or training existing staff, rather than relying on central teams. Local operations staff tend to be more attuned to local, context-specific needs and provide timelier resolutions to critical issues.

IDinsight, a global advisory, data analytics, and research organization that helps global development leaders maximize their social impact, developed regional operations teams that report to the regional lead, not to global operations. Regions are now set up as executive units that drive recruiting, talent management, security, and other functions. And, in the future, the organization may further decentralize other functions, such as communications, to report to the regional lead.

One Acre Fund, which provides smallholder farmers in East and South Africa with financing and training, is devolving as much operations authority as possible to country teams. Most operations functions have direct reporting in countries and a dotted line (or secondary reporting) to global. For example, while global shared services leads accounting, HR is led by the country teams with in-country HR staff.

Shift narratives to break the central-versus-regional dichotomy

Shifting power also calls into question the vocabulary global organizations use to describe how they operate. Several organizations we spoke with have replaced hierarchical language, such as headquarters and country offices, with language that reflects a flat structure, such as nodes, hubs, or networks.

"It's important to think about language," said **Ipas** CEO Anu Kumar. Ipas used to describe its North Carolina office as its headquarters. Under its plan to transition into a network structure and decentralize power, the North Carolina office is now a node, "and it's on the same plane as all the other nodes in the network," said Kumar.

Girl Effect, an international nonprofit working to support adolescent girls to make choices so they are healthier, more educated, and financially secure, has also shifted to a globally networked organization without a designated headquarters. Angela Gachui, head of transformation and inclusion, described how "moving from the headquarters model to the hub model means that now decisions can and should be made not simply in the UK, but also in India, in Kenya, in Tanzania, in Ethiopia— wherever it makes the most sense."

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Move Central Roles Closer to the Work

Some roles will stay with the "center," however that is reimagined. Where should those central roles—such as executive leadership, HR, fundraising—sit? Organizations have pursued several strategies to reduce concentration and move these jobs geographically closer to the work in order to take local context into account and improve responsiveness. They are finding ways to balance the trade-offs that can come with potentially more dispersed teams or the need for global recruiting.

Relocate the center to the Global South

Over the years, several large organizations based in the Global North have moved their headquarters, including core global functions and staff, to the Global South.

In 2004, **Action Aid**, a global federation that promotes social, economic, and environmental justice, moved its headquarters from London to Johannesburg, making it one of the first international NGOs to relocate to Africa.[7] A number of others have followed, including **Oxfam**, which in 2014 decided to relocate its international secretariat from Oxford to a more globally dispersed team headquartered in Nairobi, with that shift starting in 2016.

However, simply relocating to the Global South doesn't necessarily resolve power and equity issues, noted **Living Goods**' Ssegawa. "We know for sure from organizations that have tried to go this route that it is easier said than done," he said. "You can shift the headquarters from the Global North to Global South, but nothing really shifts in the power. The truth is, there is still that white man in Europe (or the United States) who has deep pockets and periodically sends money to the Global South to do work in line with his thoughts and aspirations."

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> DAVID SSEGAWA, FORMER GLOBAL CHIEF PEOPLE AND CULTURE OFFICER, LIVING GOODS

In addition, as some organizations pointed out, a global headquarters in the Global South can still create harmful power dynamics with local teams in other countries of operation.

Create hubs where staff with central roles work

Some organizations are dispersing central roles across hubs in (mostly) Global South countries.

Mastercard Foundation, which enables young people in Africa and in Indigenous communities in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work, historically functioned with a headquarters in Toronto. However, within the past two years, it has built major hubs in Kigali, Accra, and Nairobi to supplement its seven country offices. "These

7   Joanna Moorhead and Joe Sandler Clarke, "Big NGOs Prepare to Move South, But Will It Make a Difference?" *The Guardian*, November 16, 2015.

hubs are functional vehicles for holding geographically distributed leadership and staff," who are part of central functions such as operations, finance, and research, explained Tade Aina, senior director of research for the foundation.

Last Mile Health, an NGO partnering with governments to build community-based primary health systems in Africa that had a center in the United States, recently opened a second global office in Ghana to pool shared talent and resources for country teams across Africa. Creating this office was an effort to recruit and hire African talent with similar lived experiences. It also positioned "individuals closer to us to be responsive and resolve time-zone issues," said Marion Subah, country director for Liberia. The organization is now in the process of outlining how Ghana and US teams will coordinate and collaborate proactively to set up country teams for success. "Considering each country context and the differences in their stages or levels of implementation is important," Subah shared. For example, Last Mile Health's Liberia program is at a different stage than other countries since the organization started in Liberia. "Plans, activities, and timelines are important, but so are systems and processes—it is not only what you do but also, importantly, how you do it," said Subah.

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>
> MARION SUBAH, COUNTRY DIRECTOR, LIBERIA, LAST MILE HEALTH

Determine what works geographically for specific roles or functions

Global organizations are recognizing that central roles do not always need to be located together. Some jobs may require a specific location to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. Others can be untethered from place, meaning candidates can be recruited globally and based in any location. Some organizations are making these decisions based on the needs of particular jobs or functions.

Girl Effect plans to move more central staff to the Global South, but carefully considers what location makes the most sense for each position. For example, because of the current funding realities in international development, Girl Effect considers fundraising a function that still has a strong tie to the Global North for the time being. "The flow of funds is still very much coming from the US and the UK," said Gachui. "So, we need to have individuals there who understand and are familiar with the donor landscape, mindset, and expectations and have the connections, because at the moment, that's still the primary way it flows." Girl Effect has also hired fundraising experts across its global network, as the organization hopes this dynamic will change over the next three years.

But many roles are not location-dependent, said Girl Effect's CEO Jessica Posner Odede. "A finance person could be anywhere, right? People can do P&Ls anywhere in the world." Girl Effect's preference to move roles out of the Global North has raised questions about why certain jobs were London-based in the past. For example, many past roles at Girl Effect relied on non-local experts who had never spent time in the countries where Girl Effect operated and did not bring lived experience with the issues the organization

seeks to address. "So they were experts technically, but not experts contextually," said Odede. "How do we bring that together, where we have technical experts who also have contextual knowledge and understanding?"

Ipas has taken geography off the table when it comes to hiring for most functions. "All of our positions are open globally," said COO Lisa Simutami. That means applicants from outside the United States are now encouraged to apply for roles no longer tied to a central office. This has led to the relocation of the director of quality care as well as positions in HR and communications. Other shifts may happen in the future. "Traditionally, IT has been housed at headquarters, but it could be anywhere," Simutami said.

Financial integrity remains critically important, as does the need for organization-wide systems. "The question is, how much do we want to decentralize the finance and compliance function?" said Ipas CEO Kumar. "So far, the answer has been not very much. We have a financial system that runs across all the nodes. Why should we change that? It would be expensive, and it would take time. Yes, every single country could do their own thing, but that would be wasteful. And we don't have resources to waste."

Elevate Local Voices in Decision Making

Several global organizations are rethinking decision roles to reflect significant regional leadership representation. "When decision-making authority and roles are distributed more broadly across an organization, and decision processes are well understood," a recent Bridgespan article on nonprofit decision making noted, "it can sharpen decisions, improve follow through, and spur learning and growth."[8]

The intent is to better use the economic, political, and cultural contexts of the communities they serve to inform both local and organization-wide decision making. That means hiring, sharing power with, and delegating decisions to individuals who live and work in close proximity to where the work is done. It also means elevating these individuals into regional and global leadership positions and management forums. The value of local knowledge and experience is also integral when considering board membership.

Organizations have found, however, that it can take time and investment to identify the right individuals and build the right environment for them to succeed. Some organizations provide coaching or training for newly empowered staff to step into their new roles. And others take care to define responsibilities and competencies in ways that are inclusive, rather than strictly modeled on Global North norms.

Elevate local leaders to executive teams and management forums

A number of interviewees cited the challenges in managing a large leadership team, but they all acknowledged the benefit of granting voice and power to local perspectives.

In 2021, **One Acre Fund** increased the size of its Leadership Council to 18 members to prioritize country representation, including representatives from field operations as

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8   Mike Ciccarone, Preeta Nayak, Yonatan Araia, and Bradley Seeman, "Five Ways That Nonprofits Can Make Decision Making More Inclusive—and More Effective," The Bridgespan Group, January 13, 2022.

well as individuals with lived experiences.[9] The council discusses and debates key organizational decisions and establishes organization-wide strategy, new areas of programming, and core values. "The diversification of functions and identities in our leadership group has led to really strong decision-making improvements, and ultimately better decisions," said CEO Andrew Youn. "More ideas surface that are better, there is greater diversity of perspectives, and decisions are made in a way that's more consistent with our staff body's point of view. And then, as a result, the execution of the decisions is much easier, as opposed to coming up with a decision that is totally misaligned with staff, and it hits a wall as soon as it goes out."

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> **ANDREW YOUN, CEO, ONE ACRE FUND**

Some organizations have defined two leadership bodies to balance the trade-offs of size and diversity of perspectives. The **Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation**, or **EGPAF**, which seeks to end global pediatric HIV/AIDS, has a small senior leadership team and a global leadership team that comprises all vice presidents and above, as well as all country directors. The global leadership team now meets monthly, a significant change from the previous biannual meetings. "The benefit is hearing more voices that are very competent, very close to the challenges. These benefits are both soft as well as specific," said Charles (Chip) Lyons, EGPAF's president and CEO. "We have better insights and make better decisions." On the soft side, early signs indicate the changes have made the workplace more satisfying. "All of this work should be considered a part of a strategy to strengthen our ability to retain the highest-performing staff," Lyons said. "That's an objective of ours."

Hire and promote locally for leadership positions

Girl Effect's Ethiopia Country Lead Liya Haile recounted several benefits of hiring locally for leadership positions previously held by Global North expatriates. "The biggest thing is that you see a shift in the type of commitment that staff members have," she explained. "There's a difference between when someone comes from another setting and is trying to structure how you do things versus someone who has come from your world and knows exactly how things work. Often the case has been that staff

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>
> **LIYA HAILE, ETHIOPIA COUNTRY LEAD, GIRL EFFECT**

9   Andrew Youn, "We Have a New Global Leadership Group," One Acre Fund, April 22, 2021.

have not felt heard. And it's not even because someone will tell you not to speak up, it's because you feel like you don't have the space or the capability to speak up. I don't see anyone holding back now. Also, people can very much see that there are possibilities for growth. We've had people change positions and a lot of people promoted. Positions once held by expatriates are now all held by national staff."

Living Goods initially placed expats as directors in its African offices, and most board members resided in the Global North. But that has changed. "We decided that we need to make the leadership profile of Living Goods reflective of the communities or the markets we serve," said Ssegawa, the former global chief people and culture officer. The global executive team is already nearly 70 percent people of African origin, with country directors who are native to the regions in which they lead operations. "We'll continue to place staff that way," Ssegawa continued. "Knowledge of local communities and understanding the terrain are things we are very keen to strengthen, and it will continue to be a big agenda item."

Liz Jarman, CEO of Living Goods, cites a telling example. When she was promoted to that role, the local leader who stepped into Jarman's former position started team meetings with a prayer. "That's not something I would ever consider, but it was really important to the team," said Jarman. It was a cultural norm that made team members feel more welcome and engaged.

However, hiring more local leaders does not necessarily address equity issues with country and local staff, cautioned Ali, CEO of **Adeso**. "Organizations may think problems of power and colonialism can be resolved by, for instance, getting a Kenyan to head their Kenya office, when in reality they don't know how that leader will behave toward their local partners and communities and whether they will do so in an equitable way.

"Or if it is in the DNA of the organization to behave in a colonial way, then it won't matter whether the representative is from that country," Ali continued. "This is a mistake that unfortunately is often made. The change process has to be a serious examination of the values, strategy, and purpose of the organization."

Some organizations choose to focus on promoting into leadership positions. It can, however, take time for individuals to grow into these roles. In the meantime, some have opted for rotating positions in key management forums to bring new voices into decision making without rushing structural changes in leadership.

Delegate decisions to the right level

Organizations are also delegating decisions to different levels to bring in more local voices, which could require changes in organizational culture.

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> DEGAN ALI, CEO, ADESO

Living Goods has begun to delegate decision making across teams and started this transition with external training on trust building (called [Leading at the Speed of Trust](#)). "This enabled us to recognize that we need to trust people if we are able to delegate, and also bring in and be more inclusive in allowing people to make decisions," said Namayanja, the Uganda country director. Living Goods hopes to cascade this change in culture throughout the organization, so individuals at every level can participate in decision making. "We are not yet there," she said, "but I believe we shall be."

Changing these norms to create space for local voices can take time. **Girl Effect**'s Haile explains: "Sometimes I knew a team member had a lot to say, but when we would be in a meeting with the global team members, that person would keep quiet. ... You see the deeply entrenched norms that the development sector has left."

Ensure local representation for governing and advisory boards

Some organizations are also diversifying their governance structures by adding or transitioning to board members with local knowledge and experience. For example, in 2022, the chair of the **Ipas** board of directors for the first time was based in a country outside of the United States. Ishita Chaudhry lives in India.

In another example, the board for the **Association for Women's Rights in Development** (AWID), a feminist membership and movement support organization, also consists of activists from around the world. But board selection isn't just about a top-down selection of representatives from women's rights and feminist groups. "We tried to move away from the idea that board members 'represent' an idea or constituency, because our board simply can't be representative of every oppressed group in the world, nor can we expect one person to represent a whole community of people," explained Hakima Abbas, former co-executive director of AWID. "What we can do is center the most oppressed in what we do, understand politically who we are serving and who we're working with and for. That plays out, for example, when we choose our board." Importantly, AWID's membership pool of some seven thousand people votes on a slate of board candidates to inform the best board composition.

Some global organizations are also using advisory boards to incorporate perspectives of local experts, on-the-ground partners, and individuals with lived experiences to inform decisions about grants and program design. For example, the **With and For Girls Fund**, an Africa-based global fund that resources girls' activism, has recruited advisory boards of girls, young women, and nonbinary people under 30 to decide which applicant initiatives should receive grant funding in a particular country. "We realize how much power we hold as funders and wanted to share that power," said Director Purity Kagwiria. "We recruit advisors who are regionally based, and they make autonomous decisions on who receives funding. Their own lived experiences and political and regional information inform which groups receive funding."

> **"** We realize how much power we hold as funders and wanted to share that power. We recruit advisors who are regionally based, and they make autonomous decisions on who receives funding."
>
> PURITY KAGWIRIA, DIRECTOR, WITH AND FOR GIRLS FUND

Invest in Global *and* Local Equity Capabilities

Global organizations aspiring to shift power and make equity a guiding principle in their internal operations face the challenge of advancing equity at multiple levels. Many organizations have started diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, focused, for example, on leadership and board representation. Yet global organizations need to tailor efforts to each geographical context they work in, and not over-emphasize Global North definitions of diversity. At the global level, they also need to address how the organization perpetuates or mitigates harmful cross-country power dynamics, in particular between Global North and Global South nations. Among our interviewees, some have begun to invest in building capabilities that make equity a guiding principle and priority at the local and global levels.

Start with baseline equity trainings

Organizations that have committed to equity priorities often start with training programs that benefit both the local and global levels. Training typically addresses topics such as unconscious bias and microaggressions. For example, **Ipas** engaged the NeuroLeadership Institute to conduct bias trainings for all of its staff, while **Living Goods** worked with a Kenyan organization to conduct unconscious bias trainings for its leadership team. **One Acre Fund** also hired a consultant to identify and propose ways to address sources of systemic bias within the organization.

Use vocabulary that resonates for each organization

Even determining the right terminology to use to capture these multifaceted conversations around equity can be complicated and can often be driven by Global North voices. As the co-CEOs at **The Womanity Foundation** have stated, "Even the use of the word 'decolonizing' is not always the choice of many grassroots organizations that are challenging power imbalances."[10] Indeed, in this report, we use the words "Global South" throughout to refer not only to nations' current socioeconomic positions, but also to represent how their histories of colonialism have left a legacy of inequalities. In other words, language can connote the same power imbalances that organizations are grappling with.

IDInsight talks about "power asymmetry" rather than DEI. "When you think about DEI, it's quite a Western concept rooted in particularly a US-centric idea of justice," said Tony Senanayake, the former head of IDinsight's internal DEI working group. "And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. But this concept of power (asymmetry) is actually heavily informed by one of our board members, Dr. Ṣẹ̀yẹ Abímbọ́lá, who has written extensively on the issues of power asymmetry and decolonization. Our vision statement was a collaborative effort."

> ❝Even the use of the word 'decolonizing' is not always the choice of many grassroots organizations that are challenging power imbalances."
>
> **LAURA SOMOGGI AND SHIVANI GUPTA, CO-CEOS, WOMANITY FOUNDATION**

10 Laura Somoggi and Shivani Gupta, "Funders Must Reckon with the True Motivations of Philanthropy If They Want to Decolonise," *Alliance Magazine*, October 11, 2022.

Design approaches that elevate local concerns

Organizations aim to tailor their DEI efforts to address relevant local issues such as gender, caste, or religion. "Leaders need to address DEI with a diversified lens whose view includes narratives, discussions, and solutions that are representative of local contexts," said Poornima Luthra, associate professor at the Copenhagen Business School.[11] Otherwise, DEI will be viewed as an American (racial-equity) issue of limited value globally, she warned.

For example, **EGPAF** is tailoring its diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B) approach to specific needs across the organization. It first created a DEI&B committee, then surveyed staff, and finally refreshed its strategy to elevate equity as a core value. The survey highlighted the need for country-specific approaches to complement the overall strategy. Accordingly, each country team determines the focus of that country's plans to advance the organization's DEI&B work. "Lived experiences and views can have common points as well as be materially different across countries," said Lyons, the president and CEO. "Raising some specific issues can be very sensitive for cultural, political, and legal reasons—language, LGBTQ, tribal representation. Listening with purpose to move the discussions forward [is an] important leadership and team skill."

One Acre Fund has an organization-wide DEI council of 15 that "has a direct line to the board for accountability," said Eric Pohlman, its cofounder. Importantly, each country where One Acre operates has a similarly sized local DEI council as well. The mandate of these councils is to represent staff on people-related matters, give feedback to the leadership team, and act as a bridge between staff and leadership. "The DEI task forces are the main listening points of staff and are empowered to challenge any issues," added Youn, the CEO. Beyond these groups, One Acre Fund also has individual leaders request the investments they need for DEI within their own teams, integrating this into the organization's annual budget cycle.

> 66 Lived experiences and views can have common points as well as be materially different across countries. Raising some specific issues can be very sensitive for cultural, political, and legal reasons—language, LGBTQ, tribal representation. Listening with purpose to move the discussions forward [is an] important leadership and team skill."
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> CHARLES (CHIP) LYONS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ELIZABETH GLASER PEDIATRIC AIDS FOUNDATION

Oxfam India views caste and gender as critical equity concerns and has been raising them in global discussions. "We keep working on the question of caste," said CEO Behar. "It is important that this is not just about racial inequity—that we are also looking at sexuality, gender, etc. It's essentially structural inequities that we need to look at."

Employee surveys help leadership teams zero in on country and regional DEI issues. For instance, the **Environmental Defense Fund**, an international nonprofit that strives to create transformational solutions to the most serious environmental problems, decided to start with bifurcated surveys, one for US staff and another for the smaller team outside the United States, after realizing how non-US staff felt their experiences weren't being

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11   Poornima Luthra, "Do Your Global Teams See DEI as an American Issue?," *Harvard Business Review*, March 21, 2022.

captured by a single global survey, shared Rory Muhammad, associate vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The global staff survey identified region-specific equity concerns that guided leadership in shaping tailor-made strategies. The organization's DEI council set up a global task force with the responsibility to recommend ways to eliminate barriers to inclusion in non-US regions and geographies. One such step involves identifying DEI champions across the organization relating to non-US staff and consultants.

Develop infrastructure to engage on global equity

While most DEI initiatives focus on equity *within* a country or region, a few organizations are engaging on questions of equity *among* regions through global equity councils or working groups. These groups are tasked with ensuring that global equity and power dynamics issues remain a priority for all leadership and staff, while also elevating the relevant local context and considerations into the discussion. For example, in October 2021, **EGPAF** created a 15-person Decolonization Reflection Group to "assess what decolonization means to EGPAF collectively and how the institution can acknowledge [this and] adapt and evolve."[12]

Build Equitable Employee Experiences

Global organizations recognize that an equity approach to talent management should challenge long-standing practices, from higher pay and benefits for expats to performance management that undervalues local knowledge and experience. Equitable HR practices balance between setting global policies and allowing flexibility to meet local needs. Some organizations have sought to identify counterproductive norms and define an appropriate set of global principles and equitable norms that can lead to equitable talent and performance-measurement policies and experiences.

Address pay and benefits

Organizations shared that global compensation and benefits policies are one of the most complex and difficult challenges they face. They are looking to move toward greater equity for local talent but recognize the complexities—for example, how paying higher salaries than local organizations can distort local talent markets.

IDinsight learned the hard way that compensation parity across global markets (e.g., paying a manager in Nairobi and a manager in Delhi equivalent amounts adjusted for purchasing power) doesn't lead to a competitive, equitable salary structure. Because particular skills are more in demand in some markets than others, the organization shifted

> "Now we've realized that regions need the autonomy to have the compensation structure and benefits that align to the talent market of that region. What it takes to attract and retain talent in India is very different than what it takes to attract and retain talent in Kenya."
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> **REBECCA SHARP, FORMER COO, IDINSIGHT**

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12 "[EGPAF's Recent Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Journey](#)," Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, 2022.

to a labor-market-based approach to setting salaries. "Now we've realized that regions need the autonomy to have the compensation structure and benefits that align to the talent market of that region," explained Rebecca Sharp, the organization's former COO. "What it takes to attract and retain talent in India is very different than what it takes to attract and retain talent in Kenya."

In 2020, Sharp took the lead in developing the organization's compensation philosophy and a salary tool. It mapped locally relevant salary ranges to responsibility level, then calculated individual salaries within those ranges according to a weighted approach that considered factors such as work experience, qualifications, diverse representation, and performance. "We built it centrally, so the tool could be uniformly adopted by all regions," said Sharp.

The salary tool made compensation decisions more predictable and eliminated negotiations, which, as research has shown, introduce bias, particularly against women. It also ensured that employees of different nationalities in the same role within the same geography were equally compensated—a surprisingly uncommon practice in the global development sector, said Sharp. Since then, IDInsight has also built a job-grading system to clarify how roles, and different levels of technical skills and managerial responsibilities, map to salary.

"One thing I recommend is that organizations define a compensation philosophy that is consistent with their DEI principles and consistent with their inclusivity and equity goals," Sharp said. She cited an example where clarity on principles that put a premium on compensation for frontline staff led to an unusual approach to pay: A peer social justice NGO implemented a progressive salary structure that compensates field staff at the 75th percentile of local markets but used lower target benchmarks for senior and headquarters staff.[13]

A **growing global network** is revisiting compensation as a way of translating its values and principles into specific people-related strategies. "We need to be clear about 'who do you compare yourselves with, and who don't you compare yourselves with,' no matter where you are in the network," its director of people and culture describes. "As a network, we will not compare ourselves with the World Bank—we will compare ourselves with similar organizations doing similar work. For example, if we decide we will position ourselves at the middle of our market, each person in the network—no matter what hemisphere they are in—when they go and do their benchmarking and collect data, the methodology will be clear."

For **One Acre Fund**, setting an organization-wide approach to compensation was necessary to undo an ad hoc system with significant variations that evolved over time, said CEO Youn. In the past, "each country made its own compensation and benefit system," he explained. "But that left all sorts of inequities." Its new system seeks to improve equity and remove unnecessary differences. For example, One Acre recently widened and rationalized its pay bands, as well as raise and bonus policies, across countries. "They used to be all over the place, but now they move much more smoothly," he said. In addition, One Acre now offers several core benefits to everyone, whereas in the past those benefits went to

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13 Rebecca Gong Sharp, "How to Build Nonprofit Talent Systems During Times of Rapid Growth," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, March 9, 2022.

select staff. While compensation policy rests with the executive team, regional and local teams set pay based on local labor-market conditions.

Last Mile Health has developed a new compensation model based on principles of equity, transparency, and competitiveness, said Nathan Hutto, its COO. The Last Mile Health compensation model is much more predictable for staff and has "dramatically increased equity in the way that we pay people," Hutto said. Although pay is differentiated by geography, the salary scales are designed using identical methodologies. "The fact that the model is transparent is our biggest contributor to equity. There just are no secrets. Everyone knows how their pay is set. Everyone knows what band or what range they're in within the band. It's just open," Hutto said. A staff survey showed a significant increase in the number of employees who agreed that their pay is equitable and competitive. While some lessons and challenges remain, the new model has "reduced the sort of destabilizing effect of having a pay model that employees may not understand or trust," said Hutto.

Still, most organizations acknowledge that revamping compensation and benefits policies is a work in progress. "We haven't figured [it] out," said Kumar, the **Ipas** CEO. "We're asking people to do global work sitting in Mumbai and Delhi. Do they get paid the same as someone in the United States? We don't know the answer to that question. But we're not going to be attracting staff from around the world if we're not paying them fairly. And that again goes back to equity. What does that mean?"

Examine performance management

Many global organizations have acknowledged equity issues unintentionally embedded in their performance-management systems and initiated corrective changes. "Ways of getting feedback, ways of making decisions, ways of communicating those decisions, these are all US-centric," said Sharp, **IDinsight**'s former COO. "As we grow and expand our diverse and representative workforce, we need to determine which behaviors we are rewarding and consider as value-add to the team."

Other organizations have also pointed out the importance of understanding and setting expectations for how individuals contribute. Cultural differences (or power dynamics) may lead some staff to not speak up during meetings, or to speak in an overmodest tone, which may not reflect what they have to contribute.

One Acre Fund has revamped its performance-management system in an effort to correct previous mistakes. "In the past, the performance-management system valued technical knowledge and leadership skills, but it didn't value local, cultural, and language fluency, which is, obviously, [not appropriate] given that one of our core values is proximity to the people we serve," said CEO Youn. "Once we realized there were so many things like that, such as having management and leadership that's much more similar to the identity of team members, we realized that it [valuing local knowledge and experience] was a performance imperative."

Clearly articulating expectations for performance is integral to ensuring equity across different contexts. **IDinsight** has developed a rubric-driven performance-management system designed to increase candor and objectivity, and ensure a less-biased approach to recognizing and rewarding talented employees. The rubric uses a scale of one to three in

six categories—analytical ability, communications, client relations, project management, professional development, and values alignment—and spells out what each score means for each category. "There's no quicker way to drain the talent pool than to use an opaque performance-management process that's dependent on internal politics or luck of the draw," Sharp wrote in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.[14]

At IDinsight, committees, rather than supervisors alone, now approve promotions. The committee process mitigates bias, conscious or unconscious, that may creep into individual decisions. Promotions committees can include senior team leads, other performance review writers, supervisors, and human resources.

How Global Organizations Manage Changes to Shift Power and Center Equity

Change is difficult. This is especially true for global organizations seeking to transform traditional operating models to decentralize power and strive for more equity. Interviewees described their efforts as long and complicated journeys.

These transformations rest on a core tension: those who hold power must be willing to let go. "Changing the mindset of the person you're telling to actually share power is not something you expect to be natural and automatic, because power is power," said **Living Goods'** Namayanja. "When you tell some people to let go or shift power to other people, it's as if you're disempowering them, you're demotivating them."

Gachui, **Girl Effect's** head of transformation and inclusion, also spoke to the importance of these mindset changes. "I would love for these changes to happen overnight. But it's not going to happen overnight, because you need to undo mindsets." The organization faced resistance from staff who believed in the idea of centering equity up to the point that it started to affect them personally.

"I think everyone at Girl Effect believed in our ideals," said Odede, Girl Effect's CEO. "We should push decision making closer to the work. We should empower local leaders across our global and local leadership. We should strip away some of these very artificial and outdated hierarchies. In theory, everyone was on board. But it becomes quite a different conversation when we're talking about what that means for you and your job."

How global organization leaders manage these dynamics puts to the test their change-management skills—and there are numerous books and resources to help leaders, in particular, those in for-profit organizations, with change management. Still, as we probed our interviewees for what works for global NGOs and funders seeking to shift power and center on equity, they offered reflections and advice that roughly aligned along the following six themes.

> " Changing the mindset of the person you're telling to actually share power is not something you expect to be natural and automatic, because power is power."
>
> CHRISTINE NAMAYANJA, UGANDA COUNTRY DIRECTOR, LIVING GOODS

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14   Sharp, "How to Build Nonprofit Talent Systems During Times of Rapid Growth."

Create shared understanding of the vision and guiding principles for change

What we heard: Executive teams and staff facilitating change need to present a clear, compelling case for change, along with a guiding set of principles. This is particularly important given the uncertainties of this journey along a non-linear path. Organizations likely will need to learn and adjust along the way. Clear goals and principles can help guide and ground staff during those periods.

AWID focused from the start on setting transformational goalposts for different phases as the organization worked to integrate equity into multiple elements of its operating model. "We recognized we had to have milestones, but that this was a learning journey," said Abbas, the former co-executive director. "Now I think AWID operates differently. But it took us five years to get there."

Last Mile Health laid the groundwork for its new compensation model by getting buy-in on the design principles, said Hutto, the COO. "We started with a set of principles and communicated [them] clearly for people to understand the reasons for our decisions," he said. "One of the clearest examples of this is how we distribute benefits across the organization. It is premised on a belief that we want to reduce hardship for our employees. And the employees that feel hardship the most are local staff, especially those in our four lowest-earning bands. So, in order to reduce hardship, which is one of our principles, we made our benefits disproportionately go to Last Mile Health's Africa-based employees."

Facilitate reflection and learning at organizational and individual levels

What we heard: Before implementing significant changes, it is important to create time and space for organizational learning and reflection to understand the history of inequitable practices and how they play out within a global organization. Individuals also need time for personal reflection and learning, especially around their own relationship to privilege. Organizations need to recognize that these individual and organizational equity journeys go hand in hand. They cannot be looked at in isolation, and both require investments of time and resources.

Stephanie Kimou, founder of **PopWorks Africa**, which supports locally rooted development solutions, refers to the early days of operating-model transformation as the "learning together" phase. In her role supporting other organizations, she has found it important to lay the groundwork for brainstorming tactics for change. "When you learn how colonization manifests, you can better see how it's happening in your operations and your policies and procedures," she said. "Then you're in a better position to move forward."

One Acre Fund provided staff DEI training that addressed topics such as unconscious bias and microaggressions in ways that intertwine both individual and organizational learning. "The person who's in charge of our DEI training is very thoughtful about recognizing that the organization's journey relies on individual journeys," said CEO Youn. "A lot of the training material has not been necessarily about the organization. It's been about self-examination, confronting hard truths, building a vocabulary on some of these basic concepts, and more. I'd say it's impossible for the organization to make progress until the individuals have all made progress as well. That's been a focus of a lot of the training material."

Be explicit about difficult trade-offs

What we heard: Organizational change takes time and resources, often more than desired or planned. The effort involved can distract from the delivery of programs and set off alarm bells with funders. Thus, it's important to acknowledge and name the trade-offs. For instance, what will you need to deprioritize in the near term to prioritize changes that will strengthen the organization and its impact in the longer term? It may be that other organizational efforts move to the back burner or certain programs take a bit longer to implement.

One common trade-off is the time required to fill vacant positions while looking for candidates with specific lived and professional experiences. **Girl Effect**'s Haile spoke about how certain positions take up to a year to fill. While it is possible to hire candidates with the technical skill, the roles require a deep understanding of local context and experience. "It's not that there are no candidates out there," Haile said. "It's just that they may not have the depth of experience that we require, so we might need to work with them to get to the level we need. We need to ensure context doesn't become the trade-off because there will be a price to pay in being able to deliver on the work for the context we are operating in."

Maintain strong leadership engagement and clear communication tailored to audiences

What we heard: Continuous engagement of top leaders is critical for achieving effective organizational change. Frequent and consistent communication helps staff understand the impact of proposed changes and their roles and responsibilities going forward.

Ipas CEO Kumar thought that delegating to a team to plan and direct organizational changes would be a well-received vote of confidence. She was wrong. "My idea was to empower this group, give them the authority to define shared leadership and create participatory processes, and then implement a change roadmap," she shared. "But it didn't

work that way at all. The group came back to me in a few months and said, 'You can't just leave us. Like it or not, you still have a lot of positional power and authority, and this is something that we don't fully get. So you need to come back [and provide guidance].'"

Kumar regrets not having a staff person dedicated to internal communications when Ipas began rolling out changes. "I think our internal communications weren't as good as they could have been or should have been. And we heard about that a lot. People were confused. People felt information was unevenly provided. I sent out a monthly email to all staff, but email is really imperfect. People read it, people don't read it; it sticks, it doesn't [stick]. Now all of our staff meetings have included this topic. It just takes a lot more effort to communicate than anyone anticipates. I certainly underestimated how significant that scope of work is. And I wish we had invested more in that."

Some organizations also focus on specific, separate communications to those who may experience the change as a gain or loss of power. They help those groups understand the impact of change on their roles and responsibilities and devise new ways of working with one another. Katenga, global director of development for Ipas, recounted, "My observation was that—having just moved from being a country director myself—country directors were excited because they will have more power and will be able to make quick decisions, so this was a routine discussion with their teams." By contrast, Katenga said, "I found that most colleagues in the US needed more time to understand what shared power will actually look like in practice."

Identify and support change-promoters across levels and functions

What we heard: Implementing power and equity changes cannot be a top-down exercise. Change needs the input, engagement, and support of a broad spectrum of staff who represent all parts of the organization. Some organizations spoke about setting up cross-functional working groups that involve individuals from across the organization in designing organizational solutions to strengthen design and promote ownership. Others rely on champions to gather input from colleagues (who may not feel comfortable speaking openly to senior staff), provide feedback on proposed changes, and promote changes among their peers.

At **Living Goods**, DEI champions from different levels and functions of the organization meet frequently to identify areas of concern and agree on action agendas. Some 40 DEI champions also act as liaisons between staff and leadership. Living Goods decided in 2021 "that for any policy, or process, or change management of any nature to go through, first we will consult with these staff representatives through the DEI lens," said Ssegawa, the former global chief of people and culture. Thomas Onyango, country director in Kenya, is one of those DEI champions. "We formed champions within the different levels of the organization, and we occasionally meet and agree on the big agenda items," such as prioritizing how to change power dynamics within the organization, Onyango explained.

Expect some people to leave

What we heard: Some staff will inevitably leave during periods of change. Decentralizing power and centering equity may leave some people with significantly changed or even no role in the future organizational structure. For the organization to shift power, some individuals will need to yield power. Organizations should prepare for these reactions—engage in the difficult conversations, accept that staff departures may happen, and anticipate that staff departures may affect the morale of other staff.

The **Girl Effect** team faced the uncomfortable consequences of not having all staff members on board when changes were being rolled out, said Odede, the CEO. "I think it's important to stick to what the vision is and keep along that path," she added. "Today, I really feel like almost everyone who works for Girl Effect does so because they believe [in the organization], and there's now a lot of new energy and a lot of new people who are here because of this shift. They are very excited and passionate about what we've done and why we've done it. … One of our lessons has been that sometimes you might have to pull the Band-Aid off, and it's not going to be easy or pretty." Organizational transformation and change management is never easy, and Girl Effect appreciates that the organization must be committed and intentional about providing the space and support to staff as they grapple with these significant shifts.

The Journey to Shift Power and Center Equity

For the global organizations we interviewed, the question of *whether* to shift power and center equity was generally settled. Practical considerations about better organizational performance, enhanced employee satisfaction, and, ultimately, the impact they would have in the world made the decision to act clear.

Attention now has turned to *how* organizations can change in a way that preserves the value of working globally while gaining the benefits of shifting power and resources locally. This is the domain of operating models, which sit between strategy and practice, providing a blueprint for how to organize and deploy people and resources. The choices that global organizations make around their operating models either advance or hinder equity. Tilting those choices toward equity leads organizations on a journey that takes considerable time and resources. (See "Reimagining Global Operating Models: Choice Points and Key Equity Considerations.")

Every such transformational journey is different. Every organization going through such a journey will grapple with what it means for them. But the issues are similar, as we learned from interviewees as they described their most pressing operating-model challenges. The promising practices and change-management techniques they shared can provide practical guidance for others on this journey—and there are many organizations we didn't speak to that have taken different paths on their own journeys. Our hope is that this report will inspire more global organizations to learn and take substantive steps that shift power and center equity on the long journey toward true transformation.

Danielle Berfond *is a principal working in The Bridgespan Group's New York office, where* **Chanda Jain** *is a manager and* **Donald Yeh** *is a partner.* **Jasleen Kaur** *is a senior manager in the Bridgespan Mumbai office.* **Karishma Uberoi** *is a former consultant with the Mumbai office, and* **Thabo Matshego** *is a former senior associate consultant with Bridgespan's Johannesburg office.* **Roger Thompson** *is an editorial director working in Bridgespan's Boston office.*

Appendix: Contributors

We're grateful to the global organizations whose leaders took the time to share their experiences with us and the sector experts who shared their wisdom.

Global Organizations	
Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab	Last Mile Health
Aga Khan Foundation	LEGO Foundation
Asian Venture Philanthropy Network	Living Goods
Association for Women's Rights in Development	Mastercard Foundation
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	myAgro
Cadasta	Noora Health
CDA Collaborative Learning Projects	Oak Foundation
Children's Investment Fund Foundation	One Acre Fund
Co-Impact	Open Society Foundations
Digital Green	Oxfam
Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation	Population Services International
Environmental Defense Fund	Teach for All
Girl Effect	TED Audacious
Glasswing International	Urgent Action Fund
Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team	With and For Girls Fund
IDInsight	The Womanity Foundation
Ipas	

Sector Experts	
Name	**Organization or Area of Expertise**
Degan Ali	Adeso
Lindsay Coates	Center for Global Development
Raina Fox and Sam Worthington	InterAction
Stephanie Kimou	PopWorks Africa
Rohini Anand, PhD	DEI thought leader
Alnoor Ebrahim	Professor of Management, The Fletcher School at Tufts University and Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University
Sherine Jayawickrama	Organizational governance thought leader