![Publish WhatYouFund — The Global Campaign for Aid and Development Transparency]
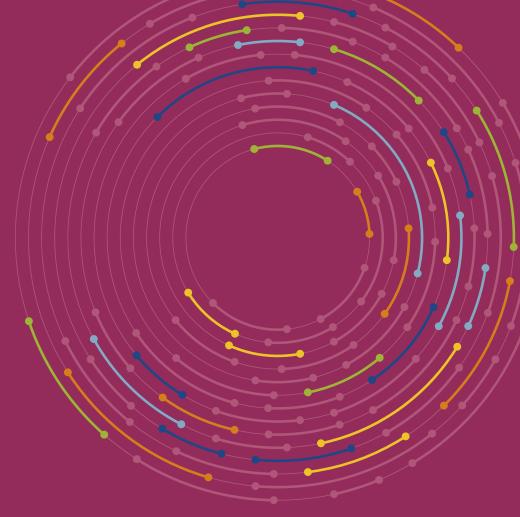
PROMISES VERSUS PROGRESS:

How transparent are foundations about their local funding commitments?

February 2025

WHO WE ARE

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid and development transparency. Launched in 2008, we envisage a world where aid and development information is transparent, available and used for effective decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens.

www.publishwhatyoufund.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The localisation movement has been gaining traction for a number of years, with calls to shift decision-making and implementation to the local level. These calls were primarily aimed at bilateral donors, but in December 2022, 26 philanthropic foundations joined donor governments in endorsing the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development. This was a public commitment to prioritise local leadership in development efforts. A key component of this commitment—Action 2—focuses on increasing direct funding to local organisations. Having philanthropies join bilaterals was, and is, a welcome step – localisation is not an easy lift so having philanthropies and bilateral donors aligned bolsters the chance of success.

What was not included in the statement, however, was a mechanism to track and report progress on these commitments.

Publish What You Fund has been researching and assessing locally led development for several years. We assessed the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) progress on its target to channel 25% of its funding directly to local organisations, and compared five leading donors on their local funding efforts. This report focuses on the extent to which the 26 philanthropic foundations who signed the December 2022 Commitment are tracking and reporting their progress on locally led development. The research focuses on the readiness of these foundations to report on their localisation progress using four factors:

- Are they reporting grant-level data using recognised open data standards (the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and OECD Development Assistance Committee Creditor Reporting System (CRS))?
- Do they maintain public grant databases with recipient details, funding amounts, and timelines?
- Have they set quantifiable targets for local funding allocation?
- Have they disclosed progress updates on their commitments?

The study analysed publicly available information, including foundation websites, reports and external databases. AI tools were used to enhance data collection and validation. In summary, we found:

- **Lack of progress updates:** only one foundation (Conrad N. Hilton Foundation) has published post-commitment data on local funding levels, although there is no clarity on its methodology.
- **Lack of standardised reporting:** only eight of 26 foundations report to the OECD CRS, and only three foundations publish to the IATI Standard.
- **Limited Public grant data:** only eight foundations maintain publicly accessible, up-to-date grant databases.
- **Minimal transparency on local funding commitments:** only two foundations (Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and David and Lucile Packard Foundation) have announced a goal for the proportion of their funding they intend to channel directly to local organisations.

The research illustrates that despite public commitments, most of the foundations which signed the Donor Statement have not, at least publicly, reported on their local funding progress. For meaningful accountability, we believe that there are three practical steps that foundations should consider:

- Publish grant-level data in an open data standard for accessibility and comparability.
- Report on the proportion of funding directly allocated to local organisations at the time of signing, and progress since.
- Set a clear commitment and goal for increasing local funding.

By improving reporting mechanisms, foundations can enhance trust, accountability, and impact in their commitment to locally led development.

Introduction

For the past three years Publish What You Fund has undertaken a range of research specifically focussed on the aspect of localisation which relates to direct funding to local organisations. While the concept of localisation encompasses more than funding – elements like power dynamics and decision-making are also fundamental – the availability of resources is essential.

Our Metrics Matter reports focussed on the progress of USAID as it sought to implement its localisation strategy and achieve its target of channelling 25% of funding directly to local organisations. Building on this, in late 2024, "Commitments Without Accountability" sought to understand how commitments to localisation have translated into how agencies measure and report their funding to local organisations. In undertaking this work, we looked at five donors[1] which are leading voices in the locally led development space.

The Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development is the latest in a long line of commitments by global actors. What makes the donor statement unique is the presence, alongside governments, of 26 philanthropic foundations, including some of the world's largest. This briefing will explore the extent to which these foundations report on their progress.

Calls for greater transparency of philanthropic foundations date back to the earliest days of the largest foundations. In the mid-nineteenth century the term "glass pockets"[2] was coined to define a culture of transparency, deemed essential for fostering an informed citizenry. In the early 21st century these calls have become louder, and since the digital revolution greater transparency has seemed more within reach. However, research[3] and commentary[4] continue to demonstrate that there is a gap between what grantees expect and what foundations deliver.

What is the "Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development"?

Announced on December 13, 2022 at the 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development[5] is a formal commitment by donors and development organisations to prioritise and enhance local leadership in development processes. It reflects a growing recognition of the importance of empowering local actors—such as communities, organisations, and governments—in planning, implementing, and sustaining development initiatives.

The donor statement consists of three "actions":

- **Action 1:** Shift and share power

- **Action 2:** Work to channel high quality funding as directly as possible

- **Action 3:** Publicly advocate for locally led development

For the purposes of this briefing, we're focussing on action 2. The full wording of the action is as follows:

"Work to channel high quality funding as directly as possible to local actors while ensuring mutual accountability for the effective use of funds, management of risks, and achievement of development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding results. This shift will require a longer-term development perspective, more flexible mechanisms, and support for organizational development and capacity strengthening. Implementing this approach will require creativity and innovation to address structural barriers to local actors' access to funding and alignment with local partners' goals and capacities. It will also require building trust, simplifying reporting requirements, and re-examining the role of intermediary organizations."

At the time of the announcement—and still to this day—no formal or agreed-upon mechanism has been established to track and report on the signatories' specific goals or their progress towards action 2. In order to ensure the commitments are being implemented, including through independent monitoring of progress against action 2, it is our view that foundations should publicly disclose information about their grants, preferably in a recognised open data standard for ease of use. They should also disclose the current proportion of funding provided directly to local organisations and/or through intermediaries, propose a goal, and disclose progress. Our research focusses on the extent to which the foundations have done this.

Research approach

The Publish What You Fund team employed a multi-faceted approach to gather, verify, and analyse information relevant to the research question. This methodology was designed to ensure comprehensive data collection and robust validation of findings.

The primary data collection process involved an extensive review of publicly available online resources, including: organisational websites, strategies, financial reports, governance documents, individual grant details, and databases. Relevant press releases and announcements were reviewed to capture official announcements and contextual insights. Two open data repositories (the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Registry and OECD Development Assistance Committee Creditor Reporting System) were explored for published data. To qualify for inclusion in our assessment, foundation grant databases were required to include the grant recipient, amount, duration, and to be updated to include at least some 2024 grantees.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used to support the primary research process by identifying potential sources for content and data. Additionally, AI tools were utilised to cross-check findings, ensuring reliability and credibility. This cross-checking process involved comparing information from multiple sources to verify consistency and validating data against secondary research reports, thereby increasing confidence in the results. All research was conducted in January 2025.

Findings

The table below presents the key findings of our research. It is evident that most signatories to the Donor Statement are not demonstrating sufficient transparency to effectively communicate their performance and progress in directing funding to local organisations. In the following sections, we examine the findings in greater detail, focusing on foundations' reporting on local funding progress, self-reporting of grant information, and adherence to open data standards.

Table 1. Comparison of local funding transparency of 26 foundations

Foundation	Open Data Standards		Self reporting		
	Reports to the OECD	Reports to IATI	Has a live database of current grants	Has a target for quantity of local funding	Has an indicator to report progress on local funding
Africa-Europe Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Anglo American Foundation	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Fundación Avina	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
AVSI Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
"la Caixa" Foundation	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Fondazione Cariplo	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Chiesi Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Foundation	Open Data Standards		Self reporting		
	Reports to the OECD	Reports to IATI	Has a live database of current grants	Has a target for quantity of local funding	Has an indicator to report progress on local funding
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
David and Lucile Packard Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Ford Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
GHR Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Humanity United	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Imaginable Futures	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
McKnight Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Porticus	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Prince Claus Fund	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Robert Bosch Stiftung	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
The Rockefeller Foundation	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Segal Family Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Skoll Foundation	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗

1. Reporting on local funding progress

None of the foundations we reviewed have posted any information regarding their performance, in terms of channelling funding to local organisations, at the time of signing the donor statement. Two (the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation) have announced[6] a desire to achieve and surpass the same 25% goal as USAID.

Only one, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, has shared any information since the signing about the proportion of their funding actually going to local organisations through a statement on its LinkedIn[7], Facebook[8] and Instagram[9] accounts: "Over the past four years, our international grants to locally led organizations have risen from about 15% in 2019 to approximately 35% in 2024."

It was notable that during our research there were very few details on individual foundation websites about their locally led development goals and strategies. Eight[10] of the 26 foundations, those which are Members of the Council on Foundations, have participated in the Council's recent analysis "Advancing Locally Led Development: An Overview of U.S. Foundations' Direct Global Giving". The report is based on paywalled data from Candid,[11] which means that access to individual foundation performance is not readily available. The report defines "direct global grants" as any grant awarded to an organisation headquartered outside of the funder's country for work taking place exclusively in the recipient country. For the Council on Foundations report, analysis was limited to the "Foundation 1000" data sets, which include all grants of $10,000 or more awarded by one thousand of the largest US independent and family, corporate, community, and operating foundations each year. The report states that "direct global grantmaking to locally led organizations increased only a single percentage point during the 2016-2019 period, from 12% to 13% of all global funding respectively." This percentage is close to the proportion of USAID funding currently going directly to local organisations according to USAID's own progress reports[12].

2. Self-reporting of grant information

In the absence of consistent progress updates on the proportion of funding that foundations allocate directly to local organisations, stakeholders will need to analyse the foundation's grant portfolio to assess progress. However, only eight[13] of the 26 foundations maintain a publicly available and up to date database of current grants. It is notable that these are all US-based foundations. Beyond these eight which meet our criteria, there were another two databases which failed to disclose amounts,[14] one of which had not been updated since 2023[15].

Some foundations report on related issues such as the proportion of their staff that are "local" while others provide numbers for their local versus international grants (albeit not with financial numbers attached, which prevents meaningful analysis). Likewise, most foundations provide examples of local partnerships in their annual reports, and some provide lists of grantees in financial statements.

3. Use of open data standards

Open data standards provide an opportunity for foundations to share their grant information in a manner that is consistent with other actors, in a machine-readable format which aids comparability and utility. By failing to share their grant data in open formats, these foundations leave a significant gap in two key datasets relied upon by academics, policymakers, and think tanks for policy research, obscuring their activities and impact.

For the purposes of this briefing we simply checked which open data standards the foundations had used, at some point in their history, but we did not check the quality, recency or completeness of the information. Eight[16] of the 26 foundations currently report grant level data to the CRS. Only three[17] of the 26 foundations report using the IATI reporting Standard (noting that for one more, the AVSI Foundation, their Uganda and South Sudan branches have reported their activities using the IATI Standard). The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is notable for the fact that its UK branch publishes data using the 360Giving Data Standard. Refer to Appendix 2 for a brief overview of these three open data standards.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research illustrates that despite public commitments, most of the foundations which signed the Donor Statement have not publicly reported on their local funding progress. To enhance transparency and accountability in philanthropic funding commitments to locally led development, we recommend the following:

- Standardised grant-level reporting - foundations should adopt recognised open data standards, such as IATI or the CRS.

- Publicly accessible grant databases - foundations should maintain up-to-date, publicly available databases of current and past grants. These could display data also provided in the IATI Standard or to the CRS. These databases should be searchable, comprehensive, and provide timely updates on funding allocations. Reporting should include grant recipient details, funding amounts, timelines, and intended outcomes.

- Commitment to local funding targets - foundations should establish and disclose quantifiable targets for the proportion of funding directed to local organisations. Progress towards these targets should be reviewed and published annually.

In addition to improving accountability, these practical steps would incentivise progress on the direct funding commitment, which is a critical factor in increasing locally led development in the short term and increasing aid effectiveness and impact in the longer term.

Appendix 1. Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development

(downloaded on 23rd January 2025. Formerly available at https://www.usaid.gov/localization/donor-statement-on-supporting-locally-led-development)

Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development

(Announced on December 13, 2022 at the 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit in Geneva, Switzerland.)

The world's development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding challenges are vast and complex, with local implications. Equally, there are increasing opportunities to address and overcome these challenges, but success hinges upon enhanced collaboration and cooperation between donors and the people, institutions, and communities who address and are impacted by these challenges every day. In doing so, donors must acknowledge and respect the dignity, agency, priorities, knowledge, rights, and aspirations of those people and communities.

To those ends, we will pursue the following actions to foster locally sustained change that is tied to each country's unique context. These actions build on previous donor commitments to advance locally led development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding efforts, including those outlined in the Paris Declaration (2005), the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Grand Bargain (2016), the Grand Bargain 2.0 (2021), the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance (2021), and the Locally Led Adaptation Principles (2021).

1. **Shift and share power** to ensure local actors have ownership over and can meaningfully and equitably engage in development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programs. Supporting locally led development requires rethinking our roles as donors; understanding and valuing local knowledge, capacity, and expertise; and integrating diverse local perspectives (including those of marginalized and underrepresented groups) into all aspects of the efforts we support. Decisions should be made in partnership with those who will be affected by them. We will work to prioritize and reinforce local leadership and ownership, and reposition ourselves and other international actors as supporters, allies, and catalysts of a more inclusive, locally led, co-created, and sustainable approach to development.

2. **Work to channel high quality funding as directly as possible** to local actors while ensuring mutual accountability for the effective use of funds, management of risks, and achievement of development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding results. This shift will require a longer-term development perspective, more flexible mechanisms, and support for organizational development and capacity strengthening. Implementing this approach will require creativity and innovation to address structural barriers to local actors' access to funding and alignment with local partners' goals and capacities. It will also require building trust, simplifying reporting requirements, and re-examining the role of intermediary organizations.

3. **Publicly advocate for locally led development** using our convening authority; our partnerships and networks; enhanced cooperation with national and subnational authorities, community leaders, and civil society; and our voice in international fora and multilateral institutions. This will require intentional and consistent engagement with local actors, including sharing our platforms with local partners rather than speaking for them.

The following donors have endorsed this statement: Australia; Belgium; Canada; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Iceland; Ireland; Japan; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania; the Netherlands; Norway; Slovenia; the Spanish Cooperation for Development; Sweden; Switzerland; the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; and the United States Agency for International Development.

The following foundations have endorsed this statement: Africa-Europe Foundation, Anglo American Foundation, Fundación Avina, AVSI, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, "la Caixa" Foundation, Fondazione Cariplo, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Chiesi Foundation, Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, Ford Foundation, GHR Foundation, Humanity United, Imaginable Futures, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Porticus, Prince Claus Fund, The Rockefeller Foundation, Segal Family Foundation, Skoll Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Appendix 2. Further information about Open Data Standards

About the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) reporting standard: The IATI Standard is a framework designed to improve the transparency of development and humanitarian funding and activities. It allows organisations, such as governments, donors, NGOs, and private sector entities, to share detailed, comparable, and accessible data about their financial flows and project activities. The IATI Standard uses a structured XML format, enabling data to be shared in a machine-readable way that can be easily processed and analysed. It captures various aspects of funding and activity, such as project descriptions, financial transactions (budgets, commitments, disbursements, and expenditures), geographical information (locations of activities), results and outcomes, and much more. Publishers are encouraged to update their data frequently, allowing stakeholders to access near real-time information.

About the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS): The CRS is a database and reporting framework managed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It is used to track and analyse international aid flows, particularly Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other forms of development finance. The CRS helps monitor donor activities, improve aid transparency, and assess the alignment of aid flows with development goals. The CRS records detailed information about aid flows, including donor and recipient countries, sectors (e.g., education, health, infrastructure), financial amounts (commitments, disbursements, and repayments), types of aid (e.g., grants, loans, technical cooperation), and channels of delivery (e.g., NGOs, multilateral agencies). The system classifies projects based on the DAC (Development Assistance Committee) sector codes and purpose codes, providing insights into the intended use of funds. The CRS includes markers to identify cross-cutting themes, such as gender equality, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among others.

About the 360Giving reporting standard: The 360Giving Reporting Standard is an open data standard designed to help organisations in the UK and beyond publish information about grantmaking in a consistent and accessible way. It enables funders, researchers, and the public to better understand and analyse how grants are distributed, fostering transparency, collaboration, and better decision-making in philanthropy. It uses a JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) schema, allowing grant data to be shared in a machine-readable and standardised format that facilitates comparison and analysis. The standard is specifically designed to capture key information about grants, such as

- Who made the grant (funder)
- Who received the grant (recipient organisation or individual)
- How much was given (grant amount)
- What the grant was for (grant purpose)
- When the grant was made (dates)
- Where the grant is intended to have an impact (geographical focus)

The standard encourages funders to publish their data openly under a license that allows it to be freely used and shared. The schema is designed to be straightforward and accessible for grantmakers with varying levels of technical expertise.

Notes

1   Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), UK (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), and US (United States Agency for International Development)

2   https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/glass-pockets-practice/

3   https://cep.org/report/foundation-transparency-what-nonprofits-want/ and https://cep.org/report/sharing-what-matters-foundation-transparency/

4   https://www.philanthropy.com/article/if-foundations-want-to-encourage-transparency-they-should-look-in-the-mirror/

5   See Appendix 1

6   https://cof.org/news/leading-global-foundations-join-bilateral-donors-commitment-locally-led-global-development/

7   https://www.linkedin.com/posts/hilton-foundation_in-2024-we-made-significant-strides-in-shifting-activity-7278462140414377985-NE8J/

8   https://www.facebook.com/hiltonfoundation/photos/in-2024-we-made-significant-strides-in-shifting-power-and-resources-to-local-org/1030100569162225/?_rdr

9   https://www.instagram.com/hiltonfoundation/p/DEGTZjITDBU/?hl=en

10   Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

11   Candid is a US-based nonprofit organisation that provides comprehensive data, insights, and resources on philanthropy. Candid uses a combination of direct reporting, IRS filings (990 forms), foundation reports, and web-scraping AI tools to assemble the world's most comprehensive database of philanthropic data.

12   Formerly available at: https://www.usaid.gov/localization/progressreport/full-report-fy2024: "*In FY 2024, USAID provided $2.1 billion directly to local non-governmental, private sector and government partners, or 12.1 percent of USAID's acquisitions and assistance (A&A) and government-to-government (G2G) funding. Of this, $1.9 billion went to local non-governmental or private sector partners through A&A partnerships (double the dollar value of FY 2021 and 11 percent of all A&A funding); $169 million went to partner country governments through G2G partnerships. An additional $88 million went to regional partners, which, if included, brings the total to 12.6 percent. Both the number of new awards to local and regional partners and the number of unique local and regional partners also reached new highs in FY 2024, increasing by 87 percent and 48 percent, respectively, since FY 2021.*"

13   Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

14   Segal Family Foundation and Skoll Foundation

15   Humanity United

16   "la Caixa" Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

17   Fundacion Avina, Prince Claus Fund and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation