

GOALMAKERS 2024

ADVANCING SOCIAL IMPACT
in a rapidly changing world

15th Annual Conference Summary Report



GLOBALWA

connect. promote. strengthen.

About Global Washington

Global Washington supports the global development community in Washington state that is working to create a healthier and more equitable world. We promote our members, bring them together to spark new ideas and partnerships, and build a network of leaders improving lives around the world. We aim to change the world for the better by strengthening Washington state's vibrant global development community and increasing the impact of our members to improve lives in low- and middle-income countries.

With over 100 members, including some of the world's most respected companies, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and foundations, Global Washington provides a platform to share knowledge, partner, and overcome challenges. We are building a dynamic network of stakeholders from which to draw expertise, exchange ideas, and form innovative collaborations. globalwa.org

About Goalmakers 2024

The GlobalWA Goalmakers 15th Annual Conference was the premier event for global development practitioners, funders, companies, and partners on the West Coast.

Global Washington's annual conference gathers top international development practitioners, business executives, corporate social responsibility leaders, academic researchers, philanthropists and others who are seeking ways to tackle complex challenges.

Despite the formidable challenges we face in global development, we see communities building resilience, innovations changing the narrative, and new technologies driving impact in exciting ways. Organizations globally - and locally - are responding and keeping pace with our rapidly changing world.

Goalmakers 2024 convened during December 3rd (virtual) and 4th (in-person), attracting over 350 attendees, with 47 speakers engaging audiences through 28 sessions. global-wa.org/2024-goalmakers-conference



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year's GlobalWA Goalmakers Conference, "Advancing Social Impact in a Rapidly Changing World," coincided with a year in which half the world's citizens were eligible to vote for the first time. In 2024, new geopolitical landscapes, technology paradigm shifts, and demographic divides converged to reshape global priorities, driving organizations to respond to complex challenges and growing demands for resilience and collaboration.

In light of these tectonic shifts, GlobalWA convened its 15th annual conference in both virtual and in-person formats. One key theme that arose was climate change — particularly how its intersection with every single issue we face, and sheer magnitude, will force us to come together to collaborate as one unified force. The importance of collaboration corresponded with another theme of human-centered, locally driven approaches to truly leverage the power of people on the planet. This idea was particularly prescient as we gathered at Microsoft headquarters to bridge the corporate world and the nonprofit world. Finally, collaboration alone may not be enough to solve the world's most intractable problems without the help of Artificial Intelligence — co-intelligence — to free our creative energy to strategize, regroup, and "say yes" to accepting the challenges we face, as Akhtar Badshah, Founder and Chief Catalyst, Catalytic Innovators Group, put it so simply.

The goal of the 2024 Goalmakers Conference was to dive into current global challenges and how organizations are responding, strategize about how we can advance social impact with challenges yet to come, and leave members inspired with new ideas and meaningful connections. This report contains some of the most salient thoughts and ideas that came out of the conference, and we will continue building on the conversations started at the conference throughout 2025. This is just the beginning.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Stokely
Global Washington Executive Director

*Elizabeth Stokely introducing the Goalmakers 2024
Annual Conference.*



Welcome | Opening Remarks

- Jill Tennant, Microsoft Philanthropies, Sr. Director of Marketing, Tech for Social Impact
- Sara Rogge, Board Chair, GlobalWA, Director for Community and Engagement, Virgin Unite
- Elizabeth Stockley, Executive Director, GlobalWA

9:00 am - 9:10 am



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In this time of immense change, we'll need to do more with less, and AI will be invaluable in that pursuit... Move with intention, not fear.

~Beth Kanter

From the start of the conference, AI was a major theme. Participants noted “geopolitics/election outcomes” and “technologies and AI” as the most influential for global development efforts over the next decade. **Steve Davis** noted AI will fuel a lot of innovation in both positive and negative ways, but he believed the net impact will be positive.

This trepidation was reflected by a lot of participants, but **Beth Kanter, Trainer, Facilitator, and Author**, urged us to get our arms around AI before it gets its arms around us. In other words, she said, “To understand the power of these ideas in collaboration with your communities, you can't be afraid of it. You need to understand that AI is not just one thing. It's a digital technology that uses algorithms or mathematical equations to detect patterns in big data sets to help automate decisions or tasks like creating content.” This ranges from Generative AI, like Copilot and ChatGPT, that can handle small tasks like writing emails or taking meeting notes and Predictive Analytics that can make recommendations for future actions, especially around donor engagement.

She recommended organizations explore and experiment before they get to enterprise-wide use and reminded us again and again that human-centered AI augments, not replaces, humans.

“AI complements the creativity, empathy, and expertise humans bring to the table. It doesn't replace it,” she said, “In this time of immense change, we'll need to do more with less, and AI will be invaluable in that pursuit.”

She warned that when users come across challenges with AI, usually the problem isn't the technology but the lack of policy, ethics discussion, and training around co-intelligence. In short, she said, “move with intention, not fear.”



Atul Tandon talked about one exciting aspect of AI innovation at Opportunity International. They gathered staff in a “Colab” — from the bottom of the pyramid to the top — to generate ideas to address endemic issues. From 400 ideas, they narrowed the ideas down to three to bring to market, using AI and technology to provide better information and resources to people living on less than \$1.50 a day. **Tim Prewitt** echoed this sentiment around leveraging AI, “One of the biggest risks for crops is disease and flooding. When you look carefully at crops, good AI and machine learning can detect that faster and help communities get out of food deficits.”

Kate Behncken, Corporate Vice President, Global Head at Microsoft Philanthropies, echoed earlier sentiments that it's healthy to discuss both the promise and challenges of AI. "One of its biggest challenges is equitable adoption, which requires widespread skilling to ensure everyone can leverage their power," she said. Microsoft partners with nonprofits globally, focusing on AI skilling at scale to balance their global strategy with translation and execution.



"Ultimately, it's all about partnerships," she said. "On the back of AI's promise, there's a risk that people might get left behind. AI tends to benefit those with agency and income in well-resourced markets." Given the work we all do, "it's ultimately about people," she added, "The magic happens when technology frees up people's time to do what only they can do." She learned from her mother that challenges come bundled together, and we have to understand the whole person, family, community, and system to create lasting change.

One of its biggest challenges is equitable adoption, which requires widespread skilling to ensure everyone can leverage their power.

~Kate Behncken



Victoria Vrana concluded the day with inspirational words about the future: "Together, we have the tools to transform these challenges into opportunities by using technology to amplify solutions, connecting donors to underfunded causes, and centering around equity in all we do. We can create a future where generosity knows no borders and communities lead the way to solving the world's problems."

CLIMATE CHANGE

It is at the intersection of many issue areas, from agriculture to health, and should be at the core of how we think about moving forward.

~Steve Davis

Steve Davis, Partnerships Senior Advisor & Interim Director at the Gates Foundation, opened with the idea that climate is one of the biggest challenges facing global health and development over the next decade. “It is at the intersection of many issue areas, from agriculture to health, and should be at the core of how we think about moving forward. It’s both a challenge and an opportunity to use these multi-crises to focus on getting a few big things done,” he said. “It will force us to prioritize, collaborate more, and be more disciplined especially around agricultural research and development.”



Michelle Burns, Executive Vice President, Global Coffee, Social Impact & Sustainability at Starbucks, noted that climate challenges are outpacing predictions two-fold. “We need to be prepared,” she implored. Starbucks has invested \$100 million in its Global Farmer Fund to promote resiliency. This includes farmer support centers in ten countries around the world that connect 20 billion farmers globally and study the effects of climate change and disease on coffee trees, develop best agricultural practices, and build partnerships for continuous improvement, learning, and teaching. It’s designed to bring everyone together — academics, experts, universities, and peers in coffee and agriculture.



In the CEO Panel: How We Advance Social Impact in a Rapidly Changing World, **Janet Tinsley, Chief Global Impact Officer at Water.org,** also talked about the opportunity that climate change provides. “Much of climate change work has been focused on greenhouse gas emissions, but there are new opportunities in the adaptation and resilience space,” she said. “If people don’t have access to water, there is no adaptation and resilience. The most vulnerable people are the most vulnerable to climate change. The question is how we connect the importance of water and sanitation and climate change and bring in the investment capital to solve it.”



COLLABORATION & LOCALLY LED, HUMAN-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far, go with others.

~Ancient proverb

Over the last few decades, **Steve Davis** has seen heavy public health and international development investment in human-centered design tools around the world, not just with major donors. This trend towards local, human-centered representation is not new but is all the more important now as organizations strategize how to accelerate the pace of change among growing political constraints and fiscal constraints.



Atul Tandon, CEO of Opportunity International, talked about his organization's focus on collaboration and a human-centered approach. When he looks at the bright spots in their work, he sees a clear focus on partnership as evidenced by an expansion from 26 partners to over 200 partners in 18 months. They go by the saying "If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far, go with others." Human-centered design is an important element, he said. "Organizations are recognizing the wisdom and leadership of women and Indigenous solutions to complex problems," **Tim Prewitt, President & CEO, The Hunger Project**, added.

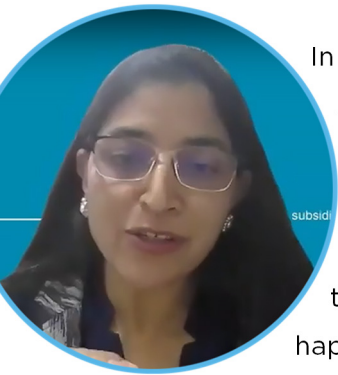


James Bernard, Co-Founder of the Global Impact Collective, and **Brian Taliesin, Global Director, Living Labs at PATH**, led an entire session on human-centered design tactics to help organizations avoid the pitfalls of designing programs without leveraging local knowledge and fully understanding the challenges on the ground. PATH, like many other non-profits today, have found that shifting to a model that trains local support has been far more effective and sustainable in realizing local solutions. Through the lens of human-centered design, participants explored how empathy maps can catalyze innovative solutions by unpacking community members' rational and emotional drivers.



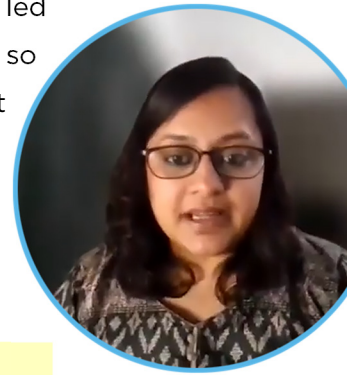
Victoria Vrana, CEO of GlobalGiving, talked about how her organization helps donors access and support local organizations worldwide, removing barriers to getting global aid to community-led solutions. "Local is important," she said, "because the approaches that are grounded in community are some of the most powerful solutions we have. Of the \$30-40 billion dollars in development aid, and only 2% reaches local organizations." After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, GlobalGiving realized they had a special role in disaster recovery because they were able to connect donors to vetted local organizations respond-

ing to crises on the ground. “Community leaders know their needs better than anyone else,” she said, “They’re the first responders and are there long after the cameras go away.”



In the Plenary Panel: *Impact from the Ground Up: Increasing Resilience Through Locally Led Development*, **Rina Soni, Executive Director of India Passing Gifts, a subsidiary of Heifer International**, talked about the importance of locally led development to challenges like climate change, inequality, and fragile ecosystems. “Locally led development is about trusting the wisdom and agency of communities so they can be architects of their own future,” she said, “Development must happen closer to the ground, with deeper roots for lasting impact.” **Shruti**

Goel, Co-CEO of Upaya Social Ventures, agreed, adding, “Locally led development is powerful in unlocking community resources, agency, and addressing barriers across gender, climate, and hunger.”



Misalignment between centrally designed programs and ground realities can lead to inefficiency, mistrust, and resistance from the communities we aim to serve.

~Ruth Mensah

Ruth Mensah, West Africa Regional Manager at VisionFund International, echoed this senti-

ment. “Over the past years, we’ve seen that top-down solutions often miss the nuances of local realities. We want to flip the model by putting communities in the driver’s seat,” she said. VisionFund International recruits its field officers and supervisors directly from the communities we serve. “It’s truly beautiful to see how invested the staff is.”



What’s more, sustainable development cannot be achieved solely through top-down initiatives. “Years of experience have shown that solutions imposed without considering the local context often fail. Misalignment between centrally designed programs and ground realities can lead to inefficiency, mistrust, and resistance from the communities we aim to serve. Finding the right balance between giving communities autonomy and ensuring strong accountability can be delicate.” From a logistical perspective, she reminded participants that it’s important for training methodologies to be adapted to the target audience for language, literacy, and other factors.

Shruti Goel continued, “Local entrepreneurs are most responsive to community needs. Supporting local entrepreneurship models allows for quick adaptation and responsiveness to community needs on a global level. Locally led development is powerful in unlocking community resources, agency, and addressing barriers across gender, climate, and hunger.” She added, “The biggest challenge is trust-building. While local leadership and shifting power dynamics are great, there’s still a lot of trust needed at each level, including funders, communities, and entrepreneurs. We can’t take it for granted that building trust within our ecosystems takes work.”

Rina Soni took this notion one step further: “In this rapidly changing world, we recognize that impact cannot be imposed from outside — it must be cultivated from within the community.” For instance, Heifer International was developing a value chain program in India and funding agencies wanted to direct the program towards individual participants. However, the community thought activities incorporating family members at the household level would be more sustainable. Listening to this insight led to a successful program that was later included in a larger government initiative.

“At the heart of locally led development is a shift in power relationships,” she continued, “We need to move beyond token participation to truly granting local stakeholders the authority to make decisions and implement solutions in their own way. It’s about trusting the community because they know what works for them and providing the resources, space, and support they need to succeed.”

Her message to funders is to adopt a mindset of partnership rather than oversight and for colleagues to engage in active listening and co-creating solutions. “Communities know what works best for them. The most important thing is having authentic conversations and really understanding the ground realities. Once this is established, other steps can follow.”



Localization even came up within the conversation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in the *Globalizing Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts*

breakout. **Dr. Anu Taranath, Faculty & Independent Racial Equity**

Consultant, University of Washington, implored “In too many US-

headquartered organizations with staff in other parts of the world, equity

initiatives derived from the US context are exported to other parts of the world.” In this

DEI context, **Carolina Rodriguez, Humanitarian Programs Director, Mercy Corps Colombia**,

talked about how hiring local staff who understand the needs and context of vul-

nerable people helps us better connect with participants. Mercy Corps wants to increase their team members from Colombian indigenous communities, who often lack access to educational opportunities. To do that, they will need to consider how to validate local experience over education attainment and other factors.



We need to provide [the communities] with a framework to unleash their potential so they can contribute to finding solutions to the issues affecting them.

~Freddy Nkosi

In the Plenary Panel: *Engaging Community Voices at Scale*, **Freddy Nkosi, Acting Vice President, Partnerships & Impact at VillageReach** said, “One of the key elements of bringing community voices into our work is placing underserved communities at the center.” Based on the saying, “Nothing about us, without us,” VillageReach amplifies voices,



but they do not speak on behalf of their communities — they can speak for themselves. They work to place the community at the center of any intervention, involving them in all processes from inception to implementation and evaluation. “Communities have solutions and ideas on how they want to improve their livelihoods,” he said, “We need to provide them with a framework to unleash their potential so they can contribute to finding solutions to the issues affecting them. When you identify these communities, bring them closer, and start working with them, putting them at the center and in the driver’s seat, you unlock their potential.”



Esther Mwaura-Muiru, Global Advocacy Director of the Landesa Stand for Her Land Campaign, added “For too long, we’ve assumed that women can have their voice and agency with foreign representatives.” Control and ownership of land are foundational to changing gender inequality and advancing sustainable development. Women who control their own land can control their income, power dynamics at home, and negotiate with the government. “We are told that 60% of biodiversity is maintained by local people,” she said, “but you don’t find grassroots or indigenous people at major event like the United Nations Biodiversity Conference.”

For **Roberto Baeza, Advocacy & Strategy Director at The Hunger Project - Mexico**, elevating the voices of people living with hunger and poverty is key to creating a world without hunger. “We do this throughout our work around the world and have seen the power of collective voices in creating change,” he said, “We should be prepared to make space for individuals to share their experiences and ideas in global spaces like Global Washington or the United Nations. The most important thing is opening spaces for people to present their realities to decision-makers at global, regional, and national levels.”



Change happens at the speed of trust.

~ *Mayele Jules*



Mayele Jules, Executive Director and Co-founder of Solidarity Eden Foundation, and Pangea Advisor, contemplated that “Change happens at the speed of trust.” If the local community sees the program’s impact and understands its goals, he said, “trust grows.” His program at Solidarity

Eden Foundation is led by refugees with lived experiences, and they work closely with local stakeholders. “It’s about honoring local values and cultures to build lasting impact.”



Adesuwa Ifedi, Africa Senior Vice President at Heifer International, closed Day One by sharing a framework for making sense of the world called BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible). She sees the complex, nonlinear challenges in our world as an opportunity to strengthen collaboration with local partners and communities. “The need for locally led leadership that is closer to the issues we’re dealing with is crucial.”



The need for locally led leadership that is closer to the issues we’re dealing with is crucial.

~Adesuwa Ifedi



Challenges & Opportunities Ahead in Global Health & Development

Steve Davis, Partnerships Senior Advisor and Interim Director at the Gates Foundation, discussed the major challenges and opportunities in global health and development over the next decade. He highlighted three main challenges: political and fiscal constraints, misinformation and distrust in systems, and climate change. Notably, climate is at the intersection of many issue areas from agriculture to health and should be at the core of how we think about moving forward. It's both a challenge and an opportunity. Despite these challenges, Davis remains optimistic due to the deep engagement and capacity of next-generation leaders, a robust pipeline of innovation, and the potential to use current crises to achieve significant progress. He also emphasized the importance of unlocking more philanthropy and leveraging different types of capital to support global health and development initiatives.



How We Advance Social Impact in a Rapidly Changing World

Tim Prewitt, Atul Tandon, and Janet Tinsley discussed advancing social impact in a rapidly changing world, moderated by Akhtar Badshah. They highlighted the importance of hope, local voices, and partnerships in addressing critical issues like water, food security, and livelihoods. Janet emphasized scalable solutions through microfinance for water access, Atul focused on sustainable livelihoods and innovation, and Tim Prewitt shared insights on community-driven initiatives and connectivity. "Organizations are recognizing the wisdom and leadership of women and Indigenous solutions to complex problems," he said. The panelists underscored the need for private capital, climate resilience, and leveraging technology to bridge gaps and create lasting impact. They concluded with a call for collaboration and continuous support for global development efforts.



Advancing Social Impact and Sustainability in the Coffee Industry

In her keynote, **Michelle Burns, Executive Vice President at Starbucks**, discussed the company's initiatives in global coffee, social impact, and sustainability. She highlighted the Global Farmer Fund, which provides low-interest loans to farmers, and established a network of farmer support centers that combat agricultural challenges through research and development and education. Burns also spoke about the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, which has supported 13,000 graduates, and the company's sustainability efforts, including EV charging stations and recyclable cups. She emphasized the importance of local partnerships, long-term thinking, and prioritizing impactful initiatives to drive meaningful change.



AI for Social Impact: Balancing Innovation with Responsible Use

In a fireside chat, **Beth Kanter and Erik Arnold, Former Global Chief Technology Officer, Tech for Social Impact, Microsoft Philanthropies**, discussed the importance of nonprofits adopting AI responsibly and effectively. Beth emphasized the need for nonprofit leaders to experiment with AI personally and professionally to understand its potential. She outlined different types of AI, including generative AI and predictive analytics, and described the stages of AI maturity for organizations: exploring, experimenting, enterprise, and exponential. Beth stressed the importance of human-centered AI, which augments rather than replaces human capabilities, and highlighted the need for ethical frameworks and policies. "AI complements the creativity, empathy, and expertise humans bring to the table. It doesn't replace it," she reiterated.

The session also covered practical use cases, such as AI-powered advising, data structuring, and fundraising, while addressing the risks and the importance of ongoing monitoring and community-centered approaches. The key takeaway was to adopt AI with intention, reflection, and a focus on human values. "The problem isn't technology but the lack of policy, ethics discussion, and training around co-intelligence," she concluded, "Move with intention, not fear."

A photograph of Beth Kanter and Erik Arnold sitting on a stage for a fireside chat. Beth Kanter is on the left, wearing a blue jacket and glasses, gesturing with her hand. Erik Arnold is on the right, wearing a dark jacket and glasses, holding a tablet. They are seated in light-colored armchairs. In the background, a screen displays the Microsoft 365 logo.



Accelerating Social Impact with AI

In a fireside chat, **Kate Behncken, Corporate Vice President at Microsoft Philanthropies**, discussed the transformative potential of AI in the nonprofit sector. She emphasized Microsoft's commitment to providing affordable, innovative technology and AI skilling to social impact organizations worldwide. Behncken highlighted the importance of equitable technology adoption to prevent widening the digital divide. Looking ahead, Behncken stressed the need for partnerships with nonprofits to ensure technology drives meaningful social impact and avoids the pitfalls of unequal access. "We have an incredible responsibility to ensure the equitable adoption of technology," she said.



Product Mindset for Social Impact

In a fireside chat, **Bettina Stix, Director of Food Security and Disaster Relief at Amazon**, interviewed **Alice Shobe, Global Director, Amazon Community Impact**. They discussed Amazon's approach to social impact, emphasizing the importance of leveraging the company's assets and technology for philanthropic efforts. Alice shared her journey from the nonprofit sector to Amazon, highlighting the need to simplify complex problems and take actionable steps towards big visions.



Alice was once given feedback that she was a "complexifier." When she stood back and thought about it, she realized she was trained in the social sector to think about the whole problem, all of the solutions for it, and realized that "sometimes we spend too much time in big rooms together mapping everything out and figuring out all the nuances, often not inviting in the people and testing our ideas with those it will actually influence, and in the meantime the rest of the world is changing every moment." She needed to turn being a complex thinker, which is a strength, into someone who can see complexity and move through it.

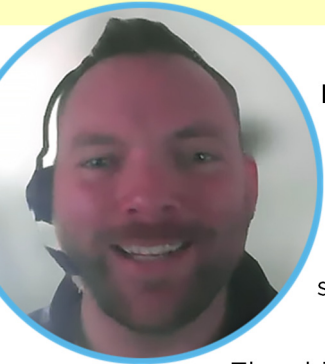
Asked how she gets things done, she said "It's about understanding who the people, systems, and mechanisms you need to get things done, and making it happen." Alice has an uncanny ability to read the room, figure out coalitions, see advocacy and lobbying strategy, and identify who has the money and who can make things happen. She coaches her team on these soft skills that are often downgraded.

"Amazon taught me to get clear about the big vision and take the fastest first step, how quickly can you get insight and data to take the next step. Then keep going", she said. "When you take that first step, you have to imagine it scaling in multitudes of ways that will make it more affordable and faster. The training I

was getting was about being realistic about the depth of the interventions you could build, but it's possible once you think about it.”

She concluded by sharing an old Buddhist mantra “chop wood, carry water,” which means to just keep doing the work when times get tough.

Putting Vulnerable Communities on the Map in Rwanda



Peter Hynes, WVUS WASH Senior Manager, Maybin Ngambi, East Africa Regional WASH Director, and Marie Leonce Murebwayire, Technical Program Manager, all from **World Vision** discussed the organization's efforts to increase resilience in vulnerable communities in Rwanda through improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs.



They highlighted the transition to digital tracking with the mWater application, which has enhanced data validation and decision-making. The panelists shared successes and challenges in partnering with the government and communities, emphasizing the importance of data-driven monitoring, community engagement, and sustainable practices. They also discussed the expansion of these initiatives to other countries like Zambia, leveraging lessons learned from Rwanda to achieve universal service coverage.

Globalizing Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts



Dr. Anu Taranath and **Carolina Rodriguez** discussed the challenges and opportunities in globalizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Dr. Taranath highlighted the issues with US-centric DEI initiatives being exported to other regions, emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches and more lateral conversations between equity supporters. “In too many US-headquartered organizations with staff in other parts of the world, equity initiatives derived from the US context are exported to other parts of the world,” she said. Carolina Rodriguez shared Mercy Corps Colombia's efforts to enhance diversity and equity through regional representation, LGBTQI+ inclusion, and hiring Venezuelan migrants. Both speakers stressed the importance of understanding local contexts, building trust, and continuously revising DEI initiatives to ensure they are relevant and effective globally.



A Community Led Blueprint for Driving Global Philanthropy



Victoria Vrana, CEO of GlobalGiving, shared her journey and the platform's role in driving community-led change. She emphasized the importance of understanding the whole person, family, community, and system to create lasting impact. GlobalGiving connects donors to local organizations worldwide, focusing on underfunded causes like women and girls, indigenous communities, and humanitarian assistance. Vrana highlighted three urgent forces: declining donor participation, the potential of technology for good, and the increasing restrictions on civil society.

“Over the last 10-12 years, there’s been an alarming decline in giving and volunteering in the US,” she said. “Fewer donors means fewer causes supported over time. It means less funding with no strings attached. Fewer donors means fewer volunteers, champions, and advocates. This affects smaller community organizations disproportionately and ultimately leads to less civic participation.” New research also shows giving results in a 10% increase in the polls and a 12% increase in volunteerism. She called for leveraging technology, supporting civil society, and centering equity to transform challenges into opportunities and create a future where generosity knows no borders.

“Technology is a neutral tool that can either erode or connect communities,” she warned, “but with the right tools, it can level the playing for organizations around the world. That’s why GlobalGiving is trying to figure out how to integrate AI into its work to protect civil society, which is being squashed. In the last five years, 72 countries have passed 270 laws restricting civil society. Of these laws, 33% restrict the ability of a nonprofit to operate or start, and 30% restrict the ability of funds to cross borders. GlobalGiving is working every day to protect the most under-resourced NGOs, doing the hardest work with limited funds.”



Advancing Social Impact through Locally Led Initiatives

In her closing keynote, **Adesuwa Ifedi, Africa Senior Vice President at Heifer International**, emphasized the importance of locally led initiatives and grassroots wisdom in addressing global challenges. She introduced the BANI framework (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible) to describe the current complex and rapidly changing world. Ifedi highlighted the need for context, data, and technology in designing solutions and stressed the importance of partnerships and collaboration. She called for radical collaboration, deep listening, and empathy, noting that the distinctions between the global North and South are diminishing, and emphasized the value of local leadership and community-driven approaches in achieving meaningful change.



Impact from the Ground Up: Increasing Resilience Through Locally Led Development



Ruth Mensah, West Africa Regional Manager at VisionFund International, emphasized the importance of empowering households to lead their own progress through community-driven financial systems like savings groups. She highlighted how these groups, largely composed of women, provide a safe place for saving and accessing small loans, which are crucial for building financial independence and creating opportunities in rural areas. Ruth shared inspiring stories of field officers like Dieneba, who started as a recipient and is now an administrator, deeply invested in her community and embodying the principles of community-led development. “Over the past years, we’ve seen that top-down solutions often miss the nuances of local realities. We want to flip the model by putting communities in the driver’s seat,” she said.

Rina Soni, Executive Director, Heifer India, discussed the cornerstone of Heifer India’s work in fostering transformative and sustainable change through locally led development. She stressed the importance of viewing communities as vibrant ecosystems with unique identities and trusting their wisdom and agency. She emphasized that development must happen closer to the ground to address urgent challenges like climate change and inequality. “In this rapidly changing world, we recognize that impact cannot be imposed from outside — it must be cultivated from within the community,” she added.



Shruti Goel, Co-CEO of Upaya Social Ventures, explained the organization’s approach as impact-first investors, fighting poverty through dignified jobs by investing in local en-

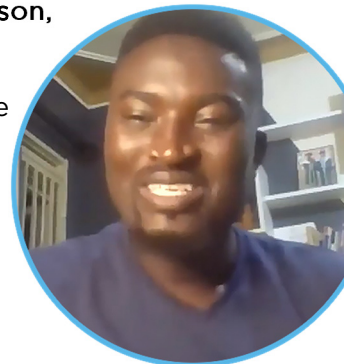


trepreneurs. She outlined three levels of locally led development: individuals as active participants in the economic process, local entrepreneurs' responsiveness to community needs, and building trust by shifting leadership to the local level. Shruti highlighted the power of locally led development in unlocking community resources and addressing barriers across gender, climate, and hunger. The biggest challenge, she said, is trust-building.

Pangea Giving and the Impact of Grassroots Empowerment



In this session, **Joshua Machinga, Executive Director, Common Ground for Africa; Mayele Jules, Executive Director, Solidarity Eden Foundation; and Allan Paulson, Co-founder of Pangea Giving** discussed the impact of grassroots empowerment through collaborative grant-making. Joshua highlighted the importance of understanding community needs and working with them to implement projects, while Jules emphasized the role of trust and local leadership in achieving lasting impact. Alan shared how Pangea supports partners through operating grants and site visits, fostering a learning community.



The session showcased inspiring stories of resilience and empowerment, including women peacemakers in Cambodia, ancestral agricultural practices in Guatemala, and refugee support programs in Uganda. "Change happens at the speed of trust," Jules remarked, "If the local community sees the program's impact and understands its goals, trust grows."



Pangea grants support women peacemakers in Cambodia.



Engaging Community Voices at Scale



Freddy Nkosi, Senior Director, Global Programs (West and Central Africa), VillageReach, emphasized placing underserved communities at the center of interventions, using a framework to integrate community insights into healthcare systems. “One of the key elements of bringing community voices into our work is placing underserved communities at the center. You’ve probably heard the saying, “Nothing about us, without us.” We don’t speak on behalf of the community — they can speak for themselves, but we can amplify their voices,” he said. He went on to talk about how communities have solutions and ideas on how they want to improve their livelihoods. We need to provide them with a framework to unleash their potential so they can contribute to finding solutions to the issues affecting them.

Roberto Baeza, Advocacy & Strategy Director, The Hunger Project, Mexico, highlighted empowering indigenous women in Mexico through capacity-building and local governance engagement. “The work of The Hunger Project Mexico focuses on transforming the structures that create conditions of inequality, which perpetuate structural problems like hunger, malnutrition, poverty, inequality, discrimination, and racism,” he said.



Esther Mwaura-Muiru, Global Advocacy Director, Landesa / Stand for Her Land Campaign, stressed the importance of resourcing women to organize and influence land rights, linking local actions to global agreements. The session underscored the need for community-driven solutions, continuous feedback loops, and leveraging existing community structures to amplify voices and achieve sustainable development. “Control and ownership of land are foundational to changing gender inequality and advancing sustainable development. Women who control their own land can control their income, power dynamics at home, and negotiate with the government,” she said. She went on to note that 60% of biodiversity is maintained by local people, but you don’t see grassroots or indigenous people at major events like COP.

Jane Meseck, Strategic Advisor and Board Member, GlobalWA, moderating Engaging Community Voices at Scale with Freddy Nkosi, Esther Mwaura-Muiru, and Roberto Baeza.





PHILANTHROPY:**Mastering Donor Engagement: Effective Fundraising Strategies for Global Programs**

In this session, fundraising experts including **Pippa Zainoeddin**, Deputy Director, Strategy, Planning & Management, Gates Foundation (moderator); **Michele Frix**, Executive Vice President, Seattle Foundation; **Karen Bergin**, Sr Director Employee Giving, Microsoft Philanthropies; **Ingrid Embree**, Managing Director, GlobalGiving; **Jennifer Butte-Dahl**, Senior Director, APCO Impact; and **Sarah Whittemore**, Senior Program Officer, Philanthropic Partnerships, Gates Foundation discussed strategies

for sustaining donor engagement in global programs amidst challenges like donor fatigue and increased giving restrictions.



Key takeaways included the importance of building relationships, understanding donor interests, and leveraging community foundations and platforms like Microsoft.com and GlobalGiving.



They emphasized the value of a Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) strategy, personalized donor communications, and innovative approaches in constrained environments. DAFs can be extremely lucrative in comparison to individual donors and offer tax benefits. The session also highlighted

the significance of in-person and virtual events, active volunteerism, and maintaining hope and resilience to enhance donor engagement and increase fundraising success.

**PHILANTHROPY:****Unlocking the Power of Generative AI to Engage Donors**

In this introductory workshop, **Beth Kanter** further discussed the effective and responsible integration of generative AI into fundraising efforts. The session highlighted the potential of AI tools like CoPilot to engage donors and improve workflows. Key themes included building personalized relationships with donors, using the RISE framework (Reclaim, Invest, Spark, Enhance), selecting and understanding AI tools, and ensuring responsible use through transparency and training.



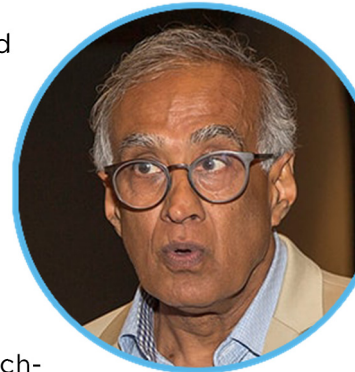
The session emphasized the importance of clear and specific prompting, creating a responsible use policy, and leveraging AI to save time, enhance donor engagement, and improve

workflow quality. Overall, generative AI can be a powerful tool for non-profits to gather information and build relationships efficiently.

LEADERSHIP:

Living with Purpose: Empowering Individuals and Teams to Align Their Purpose for Lasting Growth

Akhtar Badshah, Founder and Chief Catalyst, Catalytic Innovators Group, emphasized the importance of shifting from a transactional to a purpose mindset to create systemic change. Embracing a purpose mindset inspires and motivates, drives innovation, amplifies impact, strengthens mission alignment, and helps discover meaning and fulfillment. Badshah highlighted the significance of understanding an organization’s mission and vision as the “what” and “how,” while purpose is the “why.”



Key principles include focusing on strengths, working from a lens of abundance, using technology for effectiveness, creating movements, and embracing empathy and compassion. He also stressed the value of being proactive or reactive, “saying yes” to new adventures, and living a life with joy and purpose.

PROGRAM & INNOVATION:

Empathy Mapping in Action: Learning to Use Human-Centered Design to Address Global Health Challenges



In this interactive session, **James Bernard, Co-Founder of the Global Impact Collective**, and **Brian Taliesin, Global Director, Living Labs at PATH**, guided participants through using empathy mapping to address global health challenges in a Kenyan village. Participants explored human-centered design by stepping into the shoes of various community members, such as nurses and religious leaders, to understand their unique challenges in promoting vaccinations.



The session emphasized the importance of local perspectives and sustainable solutions. Using a lean product canvas, participants identified barriers to vaccine access and brainstormed solutions from the community’s viewpoint. The session highlighted the effectiveness of empathy and local involvement in creating impactful health interventions.



PROGRAM & INNOVATION:

Innovation & Humanitarian Program Design



In this panel, **Lacey Stone**, Chief Development Officer (CDO), USA for UNHCR, **Kathleen Morris**, Executive Director, International Rescue Committee in Washington, **Tazin Shadid**, Founder & Executive Director, Spreeha Foundation, and **Cameron Birge**, Senior Program Manager, Microsoft Philanthropies discussed the role of innovation in humanitarian programs, particularly in refugee crisis response and resettlement. They emphasized the importance of creative, low-tech solutions, human-centered and data-driven design, and engaging local partners.



Key points included aligning projects with funders' strategic priorities, fostering collaboration and responsible AI use, and focusing on beneficiaries' needs. The panel highlighted the need for continuous improvement, taking risks, and partnering with local governments. The session concluded with a call to embrace innovation, collaborate, and adapt to changing conditions.



COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING:

Adapting Communications to Navigate Complex Times



In this session, **Jennifer Butte-Dahl** and **Linda Low** from APCO Impact discussed how to adapt communications strategies in today's complex and politically charged environment. They introduced a three-part framework: Ecosystem Assessment, Communications Temperature Check, and a Toolkit for the Way Forward. The framework helps organizations evaluate their resilience, adapt their messaging, and identify effective storytelling techniques. The ecosystem assessment helps users assess key issues like funding sources, key partners, primary work focus, political sensitivity, and community expectations. The communications temperature check walks organizations through ways to massage language, change framing for sensitive issues, mobilize storytellers and spokespeople, assess resources and processes, tell more inspirational, human-centered stories, and leverage partners.



Key points included building relationships with elected officials, tailoring language for different audiences, and leveraging human-centered stories to connect with broader audiences. The session emphasized the

importance of assessing organizational resilience and adapting communications to navigate future challenges effectively.

COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING:

Moving from Paralysis to Action: How Stories that Connect to Our Humanity Can Drive Momentum in a World of Constant Change



In this panel, Mikki Draggoo, Partner, Stronger Stories; Debi Blizzard, Principal of Social Impact, Intentional Futures; Linda Low, Director, Social Impact, APCO; Jennifer Strachan, CEO, Cinereach; and Lacey Stone, Chief Development Officer (CDO), USA for UNHCR discussed how storytelling can drive action amidst global challenges like climate change and inequality. They emphasized the power of human connection in storytelling, supported by neuroscience, to make complex issues more relatable.



Effective storytelling techniques include using relatable heroes, presenting solvable problems as villains, and providing clear calls to action for a “better world.” The panel also highlighted the use of new storytelling mediums, pop culture, and real-world examples to drive donations, awareness, and policy changes. The session concluded with a focus on authentic storytelling and supporting data to communicate the value of change.



View the complete list of sessions and speaker list with biographies at our [conference website](#).

This report was developed with the help of Microsoft CoPilot to augment, not replace, the human who put it together. Report compiled by Cady Susswein. Photos by John Vicory.



Fireside Chat: Accelerating Social Impact with AI

- Kate Behncken, CVP, Global Head of Microsoft Philanthropies
- Moderator: Atul Tandon, CEO, Opportunity International

3:30 pm - 3:50 pm

Conference Sponsors: Microsoft, Amazon, Google Cloud, IBM, Oracle, SAP, Salesforce, Starbucks, LinkedIn, and others.



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