CONCEPT NOTE

10TH EAST AFRICA PHILANTHROPY CONFERENCE

Anchoring Systems in an Era of Transition

June 16-20, 2026 | Ethiopian Skylight Hotel | Addis Ababa

ANCHORING SYSTEMS IN AN ERA OF TRANSITION

THE MOMENT WE'RE IN

The philanthropic ecosystem is experiencing its most profound structural reconfiguration in decades. **Trust** has collapsed to crisis levels: fewer than one in five people in major donor markets express high confidence in charitable institutions, even as 70% identify trust as essential before making contributions. This is a fundamental legitimacy crisis rooted in how philanthropy has operated, whom it has centered, and what accountability it has maintained to the communities it purports to serve. The **trust-based philanthropy movement** gaining momentum globally is the sector's recognition that operational transformation, is required to rebuild credibility. Organizations are adopting multi-year unrestricted funding, simplified reporting requirements, transparency commitments, and solicited feedback mechanisms as standard practice. Yet tension persists between **accountability expectations** and **trust commitments,** particularly around evaluation frequency and the risk that quarterly assessments drive improvement while simultaneously creating compliance burdens that undermine the trust they aim to build.

The sector is concurrently confronting an **infrastructure investment** imperative that has gone unaddressed for too long. Philanthropy has prioritized programmatic interventions over the people and systems that enable sustained impact. The shift toward ecosystem infrastructure investment recognizes that coordination platforms, knowledge systems, policy engagement mechanisms, and shared service infrastructure generate returns that isolated institutional efforts cannot match. Organizations are moving from crisis response to deliberate system rebuilding, with resilience and adaptive capacity receiving dedicated funding streams. Ecosystem coordination is being recognized as competitive advantage and not an administrative burden. Artificial intelligence is transitioning rapidly from **innovation project to core infrastructure requirement,** and organizations without integrated digital capacity are falling demonstrably behind in operational effectiveness, impact measurement, and stakeholder engagement. Foundation giving is increasing specifically to support rebuilding systems, infrastructure, and trust architecture, with aggregate commitments reaching into hundreds of billions directed toward structural investment.

Capital flows are reconfiguring at unprecedented scale and speed. A generational wealth transfer of $124 trillion is underway globally through 2048, with $85 trillion moving to millennials and Generation Z between 2024 and 2048 alone. **Family office professionals** overwhelmingly believe charitable giving will increase exponentially as younger generations assume control. The values driving this transition differ markedly from previous patterns: 66% of millennials invest with explicit purpose compared to 49% of Generation X, and environmental concerns influence 80% of millennial investment decisions compared to 59% among baby boomers. This is central reconfiguration in **who holds capital, what they expect from it, and how they choose to deploy it.** Donor-advised funds are proliferating as regulatory changes create incentives for wealthy donors to establish vehicles that concentrate decision-making authority while enabling flexible deployment across extended timeframes. Wealthy donors established record numbers of DAFs in 2025, yet payout rates are projected to decline as these donors withhold contributions to deploy strategically over multiple years, raising questions about whether DAFs will function as democratizing mechanisms or tools consolidating elite control over philanthropic capital.

Simultaneously, federal and bilateral funding streams are collapsing across multiple geographies. Private philanthropy is being forced to fill gaps that public funding previously covered, yet the scale mismatch is deep and the expectation unrealistic. Organizations built on predictable government grant cycles are being compelled to confront dangerous overreliance on single funding sources. Revenue diversification has moved from strategic option to operational necessity. The current environment is one of the most favorable periods for **individual philanthropy** in decades due to strong equity markets, generational wealth transfer, and current tax law provisions, yet organizations struggle to pivot quickly enough from institutional grants to individual donor cultivation, major gifts programs, and planned giving infrastructure.

Operating models across the sector are transforming in response to these capital and trust dynamics. Collaborative and pooled funding mechanisms have moved from experimentation to validation, with over 300 collaborative groups globally managing $2-3 billion in annual grantmaking. These pooled funds demonstrate measurably superior outcomes compared to individual grantmaking: **they are significantly more likely to maintain racially and gender diverse leadership, implement trust-based practices, and provide unrestricted grants.** They reduce transaction costs for funders and grantees while enabling risk-taking and achieving scale beyond what individual organizations can accomplish. Funder collaboratives operate through coordination and not aggregation, allowing donors to maintain individual contributions while accessing shared expertise, streamlined grantee processes, and strategic risk-taking opportunities. Two-tier governance structures have emerged as common practice, differentiating major contributors who receive board authority from smaller participants who gain access without control.

Intermediaries have thrived to bridge large philanthropic institutions and grassroots organizations that cannot reach each other directly. They provide fiscal sponsorship, pooled fund management, regranting infrastructure, and administrative support that enables smaller organizations to access capital they could not obtain independently. Movement-accountable intermediaries deploy 50-80% of holdings annually compared to the 5% foundation payout requirement, demonstrating fundamentally different deployment philosophies oriented toward immediate impact, not perpetual endowment. Yet intermediaries face a sustainability crisis: **they perform coordination work that benefits funders and grantees alike without receiving adequate unrestricted support to maintain their own operations.** Participatory grantmaking models are placing decision-making power directly with communities closest to the work, challenging fundamental assumptions about who should determine funding priorities, what constitutes valid expertise, and how accountability should flow. These models demonstrate that shifting authority to those with lived proximity generates stronger community ownership and more contextually appropriate interventions, though they require funders to cede control in ways many institutional actors find operationally and psychologically difficult.

Innovative finance is experiencing simultaneous **maturation and contestation.** Impact investing is at a decisive inflection point: **2026 will determine whether the sector scales with disciplined integrity or retreats under political and financial pressure.** Some investors are abandoning climate and diversity commitments, while others are deepening investment in measurement rigor, governance structures, and long-term viability. Quality is replacing quantity as the defining metric, with confidence and discipline supplanting experimentation. Blended finance models combining public, private, and philanthropic capital are moving from pilot initiatives to mainstream deployment. Four primary instruments have emerged: concessional financing terms that reduce capital costs, first-loss protection that shields commercial investors from downside risk, technical assistance funding that builds investee capacity, and design-stage grants that enable project development before commercial capital arrives. Properly structured blended finance can catalyze **private investment** for development outcomes at significant multiples, yet governance questions persist around who **defines success, how risk is genuinely distributed, and whether communities benefit or absorb transferred risk when investments fail.** Family offices controlling over $3 trillion in assets globally are becoming innovation centers as generational transition places younger leaders in decision-making positions. Their priorities diverge sharply from predecessors. They favor democratized access, transparent processes, and measurable outcomes over opaque traditional philanthropy. Social bonds, carbon credit mechanisms, and catalytic capital structures are emerging as additional instruments enabling philanthropy to mobilize commercial capital for development outcomes, though evidence on effectiveness remains mixed and implementation complexity high.

Localization rhetoric has dominated development discourse for nearly a decade without corresponding structural change. The Grand Bargain commitment made in 2016 aimed to shift power and resources to local actors. Current reality reveals that only 12.6% of international giving was genuinely localized between 2016 and 2019, barely improved from 11.7% in the preceding five years. Analysis of $8 billion in United States international giving found that 61% went to US-headquartered organizations and not entities in the countries purportedly being served. Research demonstrates that localization as currently practiced often strengthens Northern NGO control by training Southern organizations to adopt foreign operational norms, reporting frameworks, and measurement systems rather than building from indigenous practice. Northern-led localization can entrench inequality as effectively as it can dismantle it. True locally-led development requires structural power transfer extending far beyond operational adjustments. Communities must hold co-decision-making authority shaping initiatives, with local leaders exercising full control over resource allocation and strategic direction. Northern organizations must abandon positioning local actors as implementers and recognize them as architects possessing proximity-based expertise that external actors cannot replicate. This demands that international NGOs step back from direct service delivery, allowing local organizations to lead while potentially playing coordination, capacity-building, or advocacy roles as defined by local partners themselves. The principle is straightforward: **programming should be as local as possible and as international as necessary, with necessity determined by local actors and not external organizations protecting institutional**

interests. African-led organizations receive less than 2% of international development funding despite building proven capacity and demonstrating proximity advantages in context understanding, community trust, and cultural fluency. Investment in local philanthropic ecosystems including community foundations, youth-led initiatives, women's funds, and grassroots networks must be recognized as foundational infrastructure rather than supplementary programming.

It is within this context of simultaneous **crisis and transformation** that the East Africa Philanthropy Network convenes the **10th East Africa Philanthropy Conference.** The moment demands anchoring systems that provide stability through transition: **infrastructure investment, trust architecture, coordination platforms, evidence generation, and financing instruments that pool risk and resources.** These are the structural mechanisms that allow the ecosystem to absorb volatility, adapt to shifting capital flows, maintain legitimacy through governance transformation, and position locally-led organizations as architects rather than implementers. This convening exists to build those systems.

WHAT THIS CONVENING MUST ACHIEVE

Establish Infrastructure and Trust Architecture as Foundational Investments: The ecosystem requires deliberate investment in coordination platforms, knowledge systems, and connective infrastructure that enable collective action. Trust is rebuilt through operational shifts in power distribution, access simplification, and accountability mechanisms rooted in proximity to communities served. This convening positions infrastructure as prerequisite, examining which ecosystem investments generate highest returns, how coordination mechanisms are governed and sustained, and what trust-based practices move from principle to standard operating procedure across diverse organizational contexts.

Navigate Capital Reconfiguration and Generational Transition Strategically: The largest intergenerational wealth transfer in history is underway, accompanied by fundamental shifts in donor values, deployment mechanisms, and relationship expectations. Organizations built on previous capital flow assumptions require deliberate redesign to survive this transition. This convening surfaces the financial models, governance structures, and engagement approaches required to position organizations for younger donor priorities, diversify revenue beyond endangered streams, and build sustainability resilient to continued volatility.

Operationalize Collaborative Models and Pooled Infrastructure at Scale: Pooled funds, intermediaries, funder collaboratives, and participatory grantmaking have moved from experimentation to validation. The question shifts from whether these models work to how they deploy as standard practice. This convening documents what successful coordination requires, how governance structures balance accountability with trust, which intermediary functions deserve sustained unrestricted investment, and what participatory approaches demand operationally from funders willing to cede control.

Advance Innovative Finance Beyond Experimentation to Disciplined Deployment: Impact investing, blended finance, social bonds, catalytic capital, and guarantee facilities are maturing unevenly across the ecosystem. The sector must demonstrate that development integrity and financial performance are compatible, that measurement strengthens portfolio management, and that philanthropic capital can mobilize commercial investment without compromising outcomes. This convening surfaces the governance frameworks, capital structures, and partnership models that allow innovative finance to scale with discipline, examining how family offices engage as ecosystem partners, what blended structures protect communities from risk transfer, and which instruments prove effective beyond pilot stage.

Advance Localization from Rhetoric to Structural Power Transfer: Operational localization is insufficient without transferring decision-making authority, resource control, and definitional power to those closest to work. Northern organizations must position local actors as architects, not implementers. This convening interrogates what structural transformation actually requires, which intermediary models support local leadership meaningfully, how African-led philanthropy builds from indigenous practice, and what Northern actors must do differently to support locally-led development without undermining it.

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS

1. Trust Architecture & Ecosystem Infrastructure

Trust has become philanthropy's scarcest resource. Trust-based practices including multi-year unrestricted funding, simplified reporting, and solicited feedback are moving from movement principles to sector standards. Infrastructure investment receives recognition as foundational: coordination platforms, knowledge systems, and shared services enable collective impact that isolated institutional effort cannot achieve. Ecosystem coordination is competitive advantage as artificial intelligence transitions from innovation to core operational requirement.

Key Focus Areas:

- Operationalizing trust-based philanthropy across organizational scales and mandate diversity
- Artificial intelligence integration as infrastructure, closing digital capacity gaps
- Measuring infrastructure returns and making the case for investment in connective systems
- Infrastructure investment frameworks positioning ecosystem coordination as prerequisite to sustained impact
- Governance models for knowledge platforms, policy engagement mechanisms, and sector-wide coordination
- Resilience building moving organizations from reactive adaptation to proactive system strengthening

2. Capital Reconfiguration & Generational Transition

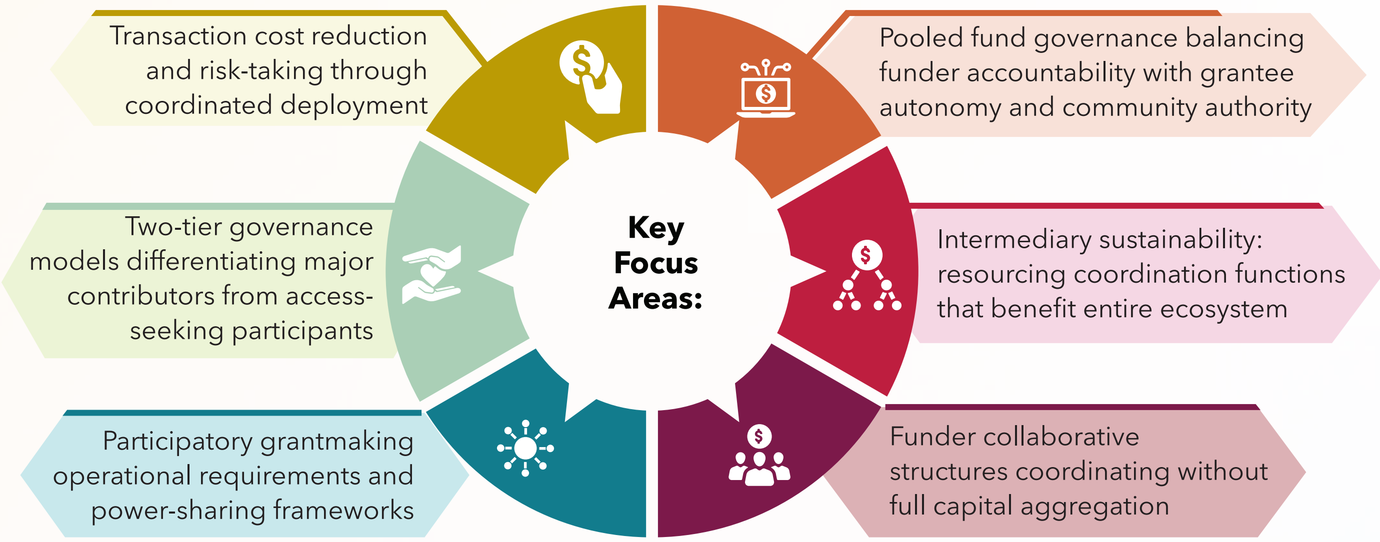
Philanthropy experiences simultaneous capital concentration and democratization as generational wealth transfer places unprecedented resources with donors whose values and deployment preferences differ fundamentally from predecessors. Younger inheritors prioritize purpose, environmental sustainability, gender equity, and racial justice at significantly higher rates. Federal and bilateral funding collapse forces organizations to confront overreliance on government grants. Revenue diversification moves from strategy to necessity.

Key Focus Areas:

- Endowment thinking and revenue-generating asset development for long-term sustainability
- Major gifts and planned giving infrastructure for organizations built on institutional grants
- Engaging younger donors without mission compromise, aligning values with operational practice
- Positioning organizations for generational transition in donor engagement and institutional relationships
- Financial models providing resilience across funding volatility and source diversification
- Donor-advised fund proliferation: democratizing mechanisms or elite control consolidation

3. Collaborative Models & Pooled Infrastructure

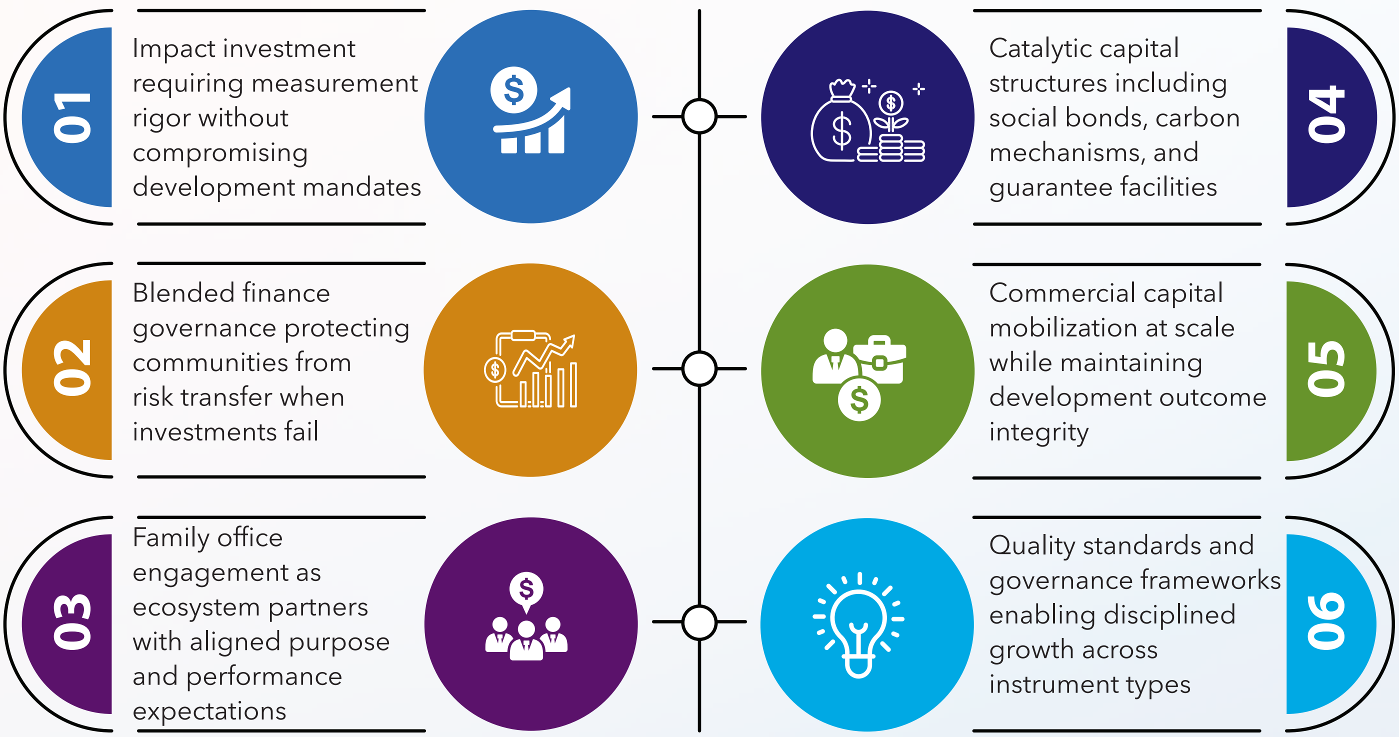
Collaboration has moved from aspiration to operational reality, with hundreds of groups globally managing billions in annual grantmaking through pooled mechanisms. These structures demonstrate measurably superior diversity, trust-based practices, and unrestricted funding compared to individual grantmaking while reducing transaction costs and enabling scale. Intermediaries proliferate to bridge large philanthropies and grassroots organizations, yet face sustainability crises performing work that benefits funders without adequate unrestricted support. Participatory grantmaking places decision-making with communities, challenging assumptions about expertise and accountability flow.



4. Innovative Finance Architecturea

Impact investing, blended finance, social bonds, catalytic capital, and guarantee facilities are maturing unevenly across the ecosystem. Some investors deepen measurement discipline and long-term governance while others retreat under pressure. Blended finance combining public, private, and philanthropic capital advances through four primary instruments: concessional terms, first-loss protection, technical assistance, and design-stage grants. Family offices become innovation centers as generational transition places younger leaders controlling trillions in decision-making positions. Implementation complexity remains high and effectiveness evidence mixed across instrument types.

Key Focus Areas:



5. Localizing Power & Resources

Localization rhetoric dominates without structural change, with less than 13% of international giving genuinely localized despite decade-old commitments. Current practice often strengthens external control by requiring local organizations to adopt foreign norms. True locally-led development demands structural power transfer: communities holding co-decision-making authority, local leaders controlling resource allocation, and Northern organizations recognizing local actors as architects with proximity expertise. African-led organizations receive under 2% of international funding despite proven capacity. Investment in local philanthropic ecosystems must be recognized as foundational infrastructure.

Key Focus Areas:

01 Structural localization requirements moving beyond operational adjustments to power transfer

02 Northern organization transformation: stepping back from implementation to supporting roles

03 African-led philanthropy building from indigenous giving traditions and cultural practice

04 Community foundation infrastructure and grassroots network investment as ecosystem anchors

05 Intermediary models that support local leadership meaningfully

01 Accountability frameworks ensuring local actors define necessity in international engagement

WHO SHAPES THIS DIALOGUE

This convening brings together:

1. Philanthropic institutions and foundations
2. Community foundations and grassroots philanthropic organizations
3. Government policymakers and regulatory authorities
4. Private sector leaders, corporate foundations, and family offices
5. Impact investors, development finance institutions, and blended finance practitioners
6. Intermediaries, networks, and coordinating platforms
7. Social entrepreneurs and enterprise leaders
8. Research institutions and knowledge producers
9. Civil society organizations and movement leaders

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

By conclusion, this convening will have produced:

- Infrastructure investment frameworks positioning ecosystem coordination, knowledge systems, and trust architecture as foundational rather than supplementary investments
- Financial sustainability strategies appropriate to diverse organizational scales navigating capital reconfiguration and funding volatility
- Collaborative governance models demonstrating how pooled funds, intermediaries, and participatory structures balance accountability with autonomy
- Innovative finance standards establishing quality benchmarks across impact investing, blended finance, and catalytic capital deployment
- Localization commitment frameworks moving from operational adjustments to structural power transfer with measurable accountability
- Cross-sector partnership agreements leveraging government, business, and philanthropic resources for coordinated impact
- Technology integration approaches positioning artificial intelligence and digital tools as infrastructure rather than innovation projects
- Policy recommendations advancing enabling environments that support locally-led development

DESIGN & ENGAGEMENT

The conference employs multiple engagement formats to ensure depth, interaction, and actionable outcomes:

01 Keynote Sessions
Strategic framing from global and regional thought leaders positioning the sector's trajectory

02 Plenary Discussions
Multi-stakeholder dialogues examining cross-cutting challenges and emerging solutions

03 Deeper Dive Sessions
Extended working sessions producing operational frameworks and implementation roadmaps

04 Masterclasses
Skill-building intensive sessions led by practitioners with proven expertise in specialized domains

05 Fireside Conversations
Intimate dialogues surfacing lessons from experience and strategic decision-making

06 Partnership Forums
Structured networking creating space for relationship-building and collaboration design

07 Site Visits
Direct engagement with locally-led organizations demonstrating operational models

INVITATION TO LEAD: CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS

The **10th East Africa Philanthropy Conference** invites practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and innovators to propose sessions addressing the structural systems philanthropy must anchor through transition. We seek proposals that **deliver practical tools, tested models, and actionable frameworks** participants can implement immediately.

Sessions may take multiple formats including panel discussions, workshops, case study presentations, interactive debates, working sessions, or participant-driven dialogues. All proposals must provide tangible resources participants can apply within their organizational contexts.

Submit proposals HERE. For questions or to discuss session ideas, contact Evans Okinyi at Evans@eaphilanthropynetwork.org or Purity Mumo at purity@eaphilanthropynetwork.org

Selection Criteria:

- Alignment with "Anchoring Systems in an Era of Transition" and the thematic focus areas
- Tangible deliverables: operational models, implementation tools, governance frameworks, assessment instruments, or decision-making templates participants receive
- Demonstrated track record: presenters must bring tested approaches with documented application, not theoretical concepts
- Multi-stakeholder engagement and diverse representation in session design and facilitation
- Interactive format prioritizing participant engagement and practical application exercises
- Clear learning objectives with specific skills or capacities participants gain
- Amplification of underrepresented voices and locally-led practice with evidence of impact

Key Dates

Date	Milestone
MARCH 10, 2026	Deadline for session proposals
MARCH 15, 2026	Notification of selection
MARCH 31, 2026	Confirmation of session facilitation commitment
APRIL 7, 2026	Accepted sessions announced
APRIL 14, 2026	Final session details, facilitator bios, and materials due

Conference Schedule:

Date	Activity
JUNE 16, 2026	Arrivals, Stakeholder masterclasses, partner side events, welcome reception
JUNE 17-19, 2026	Official Conference Days 1-3
JUNE 20, 2026	Optional site visits, excursions, and departures