C4C Quality Funding Accompaniment Paper 2026

Quality Funding: Local and National Organisations Speak

By local and national organisations | With support from Trócaire and the Charter for Change Advocacy Working Group

Background

Quality funding is a familiar agenda. The sector has discussed it, defined it and committed to it repeatedly, and much of what follows will be recognisable from those commitments. For local and national organisations, practice still falls short of those commitments. The job is unfinished, and the advocacy must continue. Hence this paper.

What this paper adds is grounding. It draws on a Charter for Change survey answered by 31 local and national organisations working across 12 country and cross-border contexts in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They describe funding they have received and funding they have been refused. Their accounts show funding that enabled timely action, continuity and organisational growth, alongside funding that arrived late, ended too soon or remained difficult to access.

For donors and intermediaries, this paper is an invitation to hear what local and national organisations have to say, to understand the realities they describe and to work collectively towards funding that matches what has been committed.

The characteristics of quality funding as defined by local and national organisations

Shaped by the voice of local and national organisations, the following characteristics define what quality funding looks like in practice. Because they arise from those accounts, they are not mapped one to one against the 13 characteristics of *Quality Humanitarian Funding Revisited*.

Flexible keeps communities at the centre as needs shift	**Predictable and multi-year** stays long enough for change to take hold	**Timely** arrives when communities need it	**Covers the true cost** pays for what supporting communities requires
Strengthens the organisation so communities have strong institutions beside them	**Proportionate in administration** makes accountability workable	**Direct** local and national organisations hold funding and shape decisions	**Equitable** shares authority and builds trust

These characteristics are closely interconnected, each complementing the others in enabling local and national organisations to better support their communities. When viewed as a whole, they show that the same amount of funding, bound by different characteristics, carries a different meaning, fosters a different relationship and drives a different operational reality.

Flexible

keeps communities at the centre as needs shift

Flexibility was named more frequently by local and national organisations than any other characteristic of quality funding. They interpret it as the authority to move funds between budget lines, revise implementation timelines when access changes, redirect resources as circumstances evolve and replace activities that no longer reflect current priorities. Across emergency and longer-term programmes, flexibility keeps the use of resources aligned with what communities need at the time.

> "Quality funding is funding that keeps communities at the centre of decisions. It is flexible enough to respond to people's real and evolving needs, rather than forcing communities to fit rigid project designs."
>
> **Nusaned, Lebanon**

Examples:

- **Community Aid for Humanitarian Organization (CAHO) in South Sudan** reports that 'flexible fund lines allowed reprogramming in response to seasonal shocks including floods, locusts and insecurity'.
- **Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD) in Uganda** describes a consortium project funded by DG ECHO during COVID-19. When planned activities were disrupted, the funder allowed approved resources to be redirected to emergency response and provided additional funding.
- **Frontier Centre for Community Empowerment (FROCECE) in Kenya** reports that 'small but flexible support' enabled it to 'adapt activities, extend community dialogues, and strengthen local protection mechanisms without bureaucratic delays' and prioritise 'community-defined needs rather than compliance-driven outputs'.

Predictable and multi-year

stays long enough for change to take hold

Local and national organisations identify predictable and multi-year funding as a characteristic of quality funding. They interpret it as funding over longer periods or continuity in the funding relationship, renewals they can count on, allocation decisions communicated in time to plan and clear disbursement schedules. These conditions enable organisations to retain skilled staff, sustain services and community structures, maintain referral systems and build trust through continued presence.

> "Communities facing climate shocks, displacement, and livelihood loss need continuity — not short project cycles. Quality funding is reliable and multi-year, allowing us to retain trained staff and sustain community structures. Predictability enables planning instead of constant survival."
>
> **Agenda for Relief and Development Initiative (ADRI), South Sudan**

> "Peacebuilding and youth development require consistent engagement, and multi-year support enables us to design programmes that focus on lasting behavioural and social change rather than short-term outputs."
>
> **Women, Children and Youth Initiative (WCYI), Uganda**

Examples:

- **Nation Wide Vulnerability Concern Agency (NAVCA) in South Sudan** reflects that local organisations supported through the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund have benefited from longer funding cycles. These enabled the retention of trained protection and community staff, sustained child protection and gender-based violence [GBV] referral systems, strengthened community trust through uninterrupted service delivery and fewer "start–stop" programming cycles.
- **CAHO in South Sudan** reports from its own portfolio that predictable funding has improved retention of specialised staff with education and monitoring and evaluation [M&E] expertise and enabled long-term engagement with community committees.
- **Action for Economic and Agricultural Development (APRODEA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo** defines quality funding through a single relationship. For 10 years it has partnered with one international non-governmental organisation [INGO], submitting a narrative and financial report each year and receiving the next year's support.

Timely
arrives when communities need it

Local and national organisations identify timely funding as a characteristic of quality funding. They describe it as funding that reaches them when needs emerge, when early warning is activated and when other emergency situations arise. They also experience timeliness through contracting completed without delay and agreed disbursement schedules being honoured. ADRI in South Sudan describes timely funding as especially important for seasonal interventions such as planting cycles, where delay can close the window for effective action. Trust Guarantee Community Development Aid (TGCDA) in South Sudan reports that when funding is late, organisations borrow or suspend activities, implementation is disrupted and staff morale suffers. Roberto Save Dreams Foundation in Zambia adds that unpredictable payment schedules create cash-flow pressure and drive staff turnover.

> "When funds are released within weeks, rapid response teams can deploy quickly, early warning triggers can be acted upon, and communities receive assistance before displacement deepens. Timely funding reduces overall humanitarian costs while protecting dignity and preventing escalation."
>
> **Nation Wide Vulnerability Concern Agency, South Sudan**

Examples:

- **An organisation in Pakistan** accessed emergency funds through the Start Network. The support was rapid and responsive, enabling the organisation to address urgent needs in the early stages of emergencies. Although short term, the funding demonstrated 'timeliness, accessibility for national organisations, and trust in local capacity to respond'.
- **FARM STEW in South Sudan** describes having to finance activities in advance and carry the cost of delayed reimbursements.

Covers the true cost
pays for what supporting communities requires

Coverage of the true cost of delivery is another characteristic of quality funding named by local and national organisations. They connect the quality of assistance to the strength of the organisation delivering it. When funding pays only for direct activities, local organisations have to absorb the remaining costs of the work. ADRI in South Sudan connects strong delivery to strong institutions and says that without fair cost recovery, local NGOs remain overstretched and under-resourced. Local and national organisations experience true-cost coverage as direct costs met in full and indirect cost recovery that sustains the systems keeping delivery accountable.

> "Quality funding covers the true cost of delivery, including core operations, staff wellbeing, monitoring and evaluation, learning, safeguarding, and organisational development — not just direct project expenses."
>
> **Action for Children and Women Organization, South Sudan**

> "For us, quality funding means funding that strengthens institutions, not just projects, by providing direct, flexible, and multi-year support that allows local and national actors to plan strategically, retain skilled staff, invest in governance and systems, and respond adaptively to community needs."
>
> **STEM Plus Community Development Charitable Organization, Ethiopia**

Examples:

- **Alawite Islamic Charity Association (AICA) in Lebanon** reports that where a donor agrees a reasonable indirect cost rate and accepts the organisation's own approval and audit systems, AICA can contract and procure faster, keep compliance strong with less paperwork and adjust programming from community feedback without compromising accountability.
- **Cercle des Éducateurs Spécialisés Amis de la Personne en Situation de Handicap (CESAPH) in Burundi** describes projects where donors financed operational costs alongside activities, which reduced financial pressure and helped improve the quality of services.

Strengthens the organisation
so communities have strong institutions beside them

Local and national organisations present institutional capacity strengthening as a characteristic of quality funding, and one that follows priorities they identify themselves. It is investment in financial management, monitoring and reporting, governance, policy development, strategic planning, staff skills and partnership development. It is delivered through sustained mentoring, access to professional networks and technical accompaniment.

> "Multi-year support, risk sharing, capacity strengthening (that is determined by local NGO), and flexible, NGO led response/design."
>
> **The Syrian Association for Relief and Development, Turkey and Syria**

Examples:

- **DSF in DRC** describes a partnership with the Dovetail Impact Foundation that combined funding with 'strategic mentoring, professional networks, and technical assistance'. This support helped the organisation develop its theory of change, strengthen its management and build a longer-term understanding of the results it seeks.
- **FARM STEW South Sudan** similarly describes support from an INGO for local organisations to manage projects and develop partnerships, alongside institutional planning support that strengthened governance and programme delivery.

Proportionate in administration
makes accountability workable

Proportionate administration is another characteristic of quality funding named by local and national organisations. They say administrative requirements should reflect the size of the grant, the risks involved, the context and the organisation managing the work, so that meeting those requirements does not draw excessive staff time and resources away from programmes and community engagement. In practice, they experience this through streamlined applications, reporting scaled to the grant, harmonised formats across donors and compliance processes that strengthen organisational systems.

> "Quality funding is grounded in trust, partnership, and proportional accountability, with reporting requirements that support learning rather than create administrative burden."
>
> **Roberto Save Dreams Foundation, Zambia**

> "Application and reporting requirements should be proportionate to the size and risk of the grant. Efficient processes allow us to focus more time on impact and less on administration."
>
> **Action for Children and Women Organization, South Sudan**

Examples:

- **CESAPH in Burundi**, working in the disability field, describes projects where donors simplified administrative requirements and reports that this enabled organisations led by persons with disabilities to partner on more equal terms.
- **DSF DRC** reports that procedures differ from one donor to another, and that local organisations adapt their systems to multiple frameworks, produce reports in different formats and manage separate audits, which increases complexity and indirect costs.

Direct
local and national organisations hold funding and shape decisions

Direct funding is another characteristic of quality funding identified by local and national organisations, which interpret it as holding grants and engaging with funders in their own right. In their experience, how funding is delivered shapes the resources available for delivery, the relationship with the funder and their own influence over programme design and funding decisions. CAHO in South Sudan reports that receiving funding as a subgrantee limits its 'institutional visibility and recognition', direct engagement with donors, opportunities to shape programme design and strategy, and access to an equitable share of overhead and administrative costs. PHALS & Garib Unnayan Sangstha in Bangladesh connects this with lower costs and increased organisational capacity and confidence.

> "Quality funding means direct, predictable, flexible financial support for local civil society organisations like FROCECE so we can set priorities with communities rather than implement donor designed programmes."
>
> **Frontier Centre for Community Empowerment, Kenya**

Barriers to direct funding:

- **ADRI in South Sudan** describes requirements for prior experience of managing large grants.
- **Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum** reports that due diligence assessments can exclude capable organisations when the same expectations are applied to organisations at different stages of institutional development.
- **AICA in Lebanon** describes invitation-only funding windows, unclear entry points, limited access to decision-makers and short periods in which to prepare proposals.
- **PAKAYA, WCYI, Human Appeal Associates and DSF DRC** identify donor language requirements, digital submission systems, complex applications and repeated due diligence as barriers for organisations without specialist staff or established donor relationships.
- **CEFORD in Uganda** identifies co-financing requirements attached to indirect cost recovery, which project-funded organisations may be unable to meet.

Equitable
shares authority and builds trust

Local and national organisations also describe quality funding as equitable, associating it with trust-based partnership, shared programme decisions and open communication. CEFORD in Uganda describes this as funding that promotes partnership rather than control. AICA in Lebanon calls for a 'horizontal partnership showing meaningful participation in decisions'. Women, Children and Youth Initiative in Uganda values funders who 'share responsibility for risks and learning' and describes open dialogue, reflection and adaptive learning as strengthening programme delivery and innovation.

> "For our organisation, quality funding is not only about financial resources; it is about dignity, autonomy, and sustainability — ensuring that we can lead solutions rooted in our community's realities while building long-term resilience and impact beyond a single grant cycle."
>
> **STEM Plus Community Development Charitable Organization, Ethiopia**

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- Trust Guarantee Community Development Aid (TGCDA), South Sudan
- Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum, Uganda
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- Women, Children and Youth Initiative, Uganda

If your organisation has best practice examples of quality funding which you would like to share to inspire change in practice, please email (c4c-advocacy@dgroups.io).

This paper was drafted by Sheetal Rana of Trócaire for the Charter for Change Advocacy Working Group, drawing on survey responses from the local and national organisations named as co-authors. Thanks to all Charter for Change endorsers and signatories for their collaboration, input and expertise in developing this account of what local and national organisations identify as quality funding.

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