



# Children, Youth, and Communities Leading Change

Global Fund for Children's  
Five-Year Vision 2022–2026





# Contents

Introduction	<b>02</b>
Vision for the Future	<b>06</b>
Core Principles	<b>13</b>
Guiding Stars	<b>15</b>
Strategic Priorities	<b>18</b>





# Introduction

**Global Fund for Children partners with community-based organizations around the globe to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights.**

We are the only global nonprofit dedicated to finding, funding, and partnering with truly community-based organizations that empower young people worldwide. By pairing flexible funding with targeted capacity development services, we help our partners grow stronger and more responsive to challenges on the ground. Since 1997, we have invested \$51 million in more than 900 organizations worldwide.



**In 2021, we embarked on a journey to articulate a new vision to guide Global Fund for Children’s future work.**

We reflected on our 25-year history, born out of our founder Maya Ajmera’s “moment of obligation” at an informal school on a train platform in Bhubaneswar, India, and growing to a global network of nearly 1,000 community-based organizations working toward transformational change with and for young people. We listened to the ideas of those who are closest to our work, from our global team members to youth and community leaders across the world.

**Our five-year vision for  
2022–2026, *Children, Youth,  
and Communities Leading  
Change*, is the result.**

Our new vision unites us around the same principles that have inspired our work from the very start, including trusting grassroots leadership and transforming power in funding relationships in service of children's rights. At the same time, it outlines a bold path forward that pushes Global Fund for Children to emerge as a vibrant, global hub that centers children, youth, and their communities as drivers of systemic change.












# Our Vision for the Future





## We envision a more just world for all children and youth.

We imagine a world where all children and youth have the rights, opportunities, and agency to help them reach their full potential. We envision new systems and ways of being together where power and resources are more equitably distributed. In this more just world, young people are valued members of society; they bring energy, creativity, and insight to help shape their lives and communities.

## Systemic inequity, poverty, and exclusion present barriers.

We recognize that the path toward this vision has mountains to climb. The COVID-19 pandemic has put the inequity and injustice embedded in our global systems into sharp relief. Children and youth around the world acutely feel the effects of this health crisis, and for many, these effects layer upon the deep roots of poverty and exclusion.



## Young people are raising their voices for change.

Yet youth are no newcomers to the frontlines of social movements. Young people are raising their voices around climate change, spurred by the conviction that without action they may not enjoy a future on a livable planet. They are demanding quality education, decent work, and access to technology. They are mobilizing to resist rising authoritarianism and backlash against efforts to achieve gender equity, advance rights, and challenge harmful social norms.

## Philanthropy can meet this moment.

The philanthropic sector can meet this moment and open pathways toward more transformative ways of navigating power and resources. Collectively, we have a rare and urgent opportunity to reshape norms, policies, and institutions to promote greater rights and wellbeing for all.



## **We're no stranger to catalyzing change.**

Global Fund for Children is no stranger to catalyzing change. GFC was founded to challenge how resources get to the people who need them. In our vision for 2022–2026, we aim to build on our 25-year history to emerge as a vibrant, global hub that centers children, youth, and their communities as drivers of systemic change.

## **We know change isn't neat or linear.**

We know that this change does not fit into neat categories; rather, it cuts across boundaries and borders. We embrace approaches that center children and youth in the communities and systems they are a part of and avoid a narrow focus on isolated issues.

## **We nurture collective and interconnected efforts.**

In our new vision, we will stretch ourselves beyond our focus areas of education, gender equity, freedom from violence and exploitation, and youth empowerment to see the work we support in broader terms—advancing rights, opportunities, and agency for children and youth in areas in which young people and our community partners seek to make change. As change is sparked through collective approaches, we will invite our community-based partners to join us in peer groups to foster solidarity and exchange of ideas. We will support organizations that delve into interconnected thematic areas that build upon our experience and relationships, while engaging with new critical issues that emerge from our partners and their communities. Together, we can create new narratives and ways of being.



## Our approach is driven by listening to those closest to our work.

As we reflected on where we have come from and where we are headed, we listened to our community-based partners around the world, our team, our Youth Leadership Council, and our Board. We used surveys, small group conversations, and interviews to hear from those closest to us and scanned the broader field for insights and trends.



## What they told us will guide our work over the next five years.

As we listened, we heard principles, pillars, and priorities that will shape our work over the next five years.

Interwoven across our work, our three **Core Principles** of **shifting power**, **wellbeing**, and **interconnection** will nourish and underpin all that we do.

Our two **Guiding Stars** of **community-driven systems change** and **children and youth as leaders and changemakers** will keep us focused and give our work clear direction.

Our five external and internal **Strategic Priorities** of **connect**, **influence**, **learn**, **nurture**, and **sustain** will further shape our objectives as we chart a course through growth. In the world around us, we will focus on weaving change through dynamic networks, shifting the funding ecosystem, and sharing collaborative insight. Within our organization, we will nurture and sustain our core through a joyful and creative global team and a thriving GFC.

**Join us in realizing this five-year vision.**



# Our Core Principles

## **What keeps us grounded?**

Interwoven across our work, our three Core Principles nourish and underpin everything we do.

## **Shifting Power**

We are committed to questioning where power lies and fostering more equitable and just relationships and practices. We will challenge ourselves toward deeper reflection into racial inequity and injustice and other systems of oppression. We will strive for greater equity and inclusion in funding priorities and decisions, grantmaking practices, Board membership, and relationships with our partners and donors. We will stand with our partners as they challenge themselves to build relationships that are more equitable with the young people they work with, their communities, and those who support their work.

## Wellbeing

Weaving wellbeing throughout our lives and work brings us, our community partners, and young people new possibilities to thrive. Deeper meaning, more authentic relationships, and greater space for play and creativity are essential to sustain our shared purpose for social change in the face of increasingly harsh and hostile environments. We believe in a world where young people are happy with their lives, feel safe and secure, build strong relationships, develop their minds and talents, and engage in the world around them. That vision is possible when we see ourselves and our partners and peers journeying together toward deeper individual and collective wellbeing.

## Interconnection

We believe that the issues our community-based partners tackle are part of interconnected systems that affect children wherever they are — at school, at home, or in the community. We will stand with our partners as they embrace complexity and the messiness of change. We support ways of seeing children as whole beings with social-emotional, physical, creative, cognitive, and political dimensions. We acknowledge the multiple forms of oppression that affect children's lives, and we understand that oppression impacts children in different ways, often depending on where they are born and aspects of their identities. While our partners, children and youth, and our supporters play different roles, we see all of us connected through our desire for positive change.

# Our Guiding Stars

**What keeps us climbing in the right direction?**

As we explore all that our vision entails, two bright Guiding Stars keep us focused on getting bolder and stronger.

# Community-Driven Systems Change<sup>1</sup>

**We support community-led groups to shift social norms, behaviors, and policies that foster lasting change for children and youth.**

<sup>1</sup> As defined by Firelight Foundation, community-driven systems change is “an approach to development and social transformation that emphasizes the insight, leadership, and ownership of the people who are living and experiencing issues at the community level, and their work to create lasting change in the systems and root causes that underlie the critical issues they seek to address.” Along with many funders and other organizations, GFC is increasingly committed to this important approach.

For most of our history, we have helped individual organizations thrive. In our new vision, we continue to walk with each group on its journey, while focusing on partners that seek to understand the root causes of issues and collaborate with peers and others to work toward more transformative change. While our partners seek change in individual lives, many are also contributing to broader changes in the rights of children: to be educated, to live free from discrimination and abuse, to enjoy an adequate standard of living, to play, and to participate in their communities.

We already see examples of this change, with partners finding new ways to listen to communities and help their dreams emerge. We will support our partners to identify the changes in the norms, laws, and policies where their work can make a difference. By being there for our partners, we will continue to ground our relationships in deep trust across all our practices and interactions. We will experiment with new funding models and peer collaborations where communities are the drivers of change for young people, while holding true to the core values that frame our relationships.

# Children and Youth as Leaders and Changemakers

**We center children and youth as protagonists in their own lives and the world around them.**

We recognize that children and youth are part of communities and wider systems and that empowering intergenerational relationships can contribute to everyone's wellbeing. Far too often, the assumption that young people are less important or capable than adults means a missed opportunity for their courage and innovative thinking to transform the status quo. We commit to supporting young people who are dedicated to human rights. We will do this by listening deeply to the dreams of youth-led organizations, committing to be flexible in our mindsets and practices. We will learn from participatory grantmaking where young people make funding decisions, make sure that young people are able to influence our work in meaningful ways through advisory councils, create relevant learning experiences for young people who join our organization as interns and fellows, and weave young people into public spaces and networks where their voices are heard.

# Our Strategic Priorities

**How do we focus our objectives?** While our Core Principles are interwoven across our work, our Guiding Stars give us clear direction through five external and internal Strategic Priorities.

# The World Around Us





# Connect: Weaving Change through Dynamic Networks

**We believe that community-driven systems change is supported when individuals and groups come together to find common purpose, learn, and identify paths toward change.**

Connecting and joining networks is an important part of our strategy to reduce isolation and enable deeper change. We help activate and support networks of different types led by our community-based partners. Some are informal and geared toward mutual support and learning together, while others aim for collective change and may be part of larger movements.

We also convene with peers to share and learn from common practices and strategies that center trust and collaboration and challenge power imbalances. We incubate, lead, and play a role in collaborations with other funders that advance resources and support for community-driven change for children and youth.





# Influence: Shifting the Funding Ecosystem

**In order for community-driven systems change to thrive, groups that are grounded in lived experience and accountable to their local communities must be recognized as the most trusted, effective actors.**

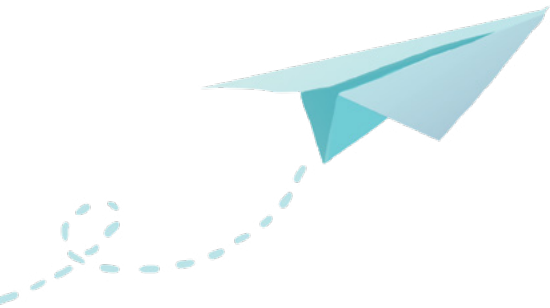
While we see progress, much more needs to happen to ensure flexible, long-term financial support for community leaders to drive change in ways not directed by the historically wealthy and politically powerful. Our partners have called upon us to help influence the larger environment that affects their work, in times of both crisis and stability. We will amplify the visions, voices, and leadership of community leaders and young changemakers for a more equitable ecosystem that provides resources for social change where and how they are needed most. In our new vision, we aim to raise more flexible and long-term funds, strengthen relationships with our donors as we work to advance understanding of community-driven systems change, share strategies with peers, and encourage the wider philanthropic community to become more bold and inclusive.



# Learn: Sharing Collaborative Insight

**We believe that learning is an integral part of community-driven systems change.**

We recognize that community groups have much to teach each other and us. In our new vision, we aim to strengthen and deepen our focus on practical and actionable learning in collaboration with our partners and peers. We will challenge the notion that funders should establish predetermined outcomes, require extensive reporting, or drive learning agendas. We pledge to bring both creative experimentation and a systematic approach to our learning. We will experiment with co-designed evaluation activities, identify ways for young people to define what counts as success in their work, and help weave common threads of insights across our partners' work.



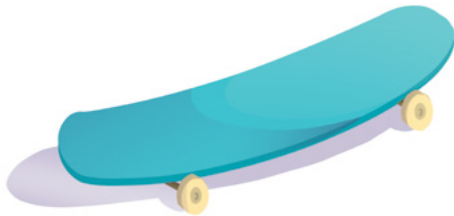
# Our Core

Our dynamic team and the joyful work culture we create together across borders is what keeps us rooted and nourished to reach toward our Guiding Stars.



# Nurture: A Joyful and Creative Global Team

**We create ways of working and policies that support our inner journeys, creative expression, and self and collective care.**



Cultivating affection, openness, and compassion gives us strength to navigate organizational and global change and helps us stay connected while spread across the world. In our new vision, we also commit to doing the deep work of becoming more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible, and strengthening our commitment to challenging oppression at all levels. It is ever important to be part of change that disrupts systems that limit or harm the wholeness, belonging, safety, and potential of individuals and communities. This change starts with us as a team that increasingly reflects the world's diversity, marginalized communities, and young people. We will move forward with greater consciousness, inclusive belonging, and practices grounded in equity and justice.





# Sustain: A Thriving GFC

**Our partners have asked us to grow—in influence, in our capacity to offer more long-term funding, in deepening our global footprint.**



When our own organization thrives, it gives us the foundation to do more to foster community-driven change and support young leaders. In our new vision, we aim to be rooted enough to take advantage of opportunities, respond to crises, fund things others aren't, and be resilient against unexpected events. We are committed to raising funds as an act of solidarity with our partners and ensuring that those funds remain flexible. We also seek to establish a long-term Opportunity and Resilience Fund for GFC to help ensure we can thrive and embrace new opportunities when they come our way.



## **Contact**

---

### **Global Fund for Children**

Washington, DC, United States  
+1 202.331.9003  
[info@globalfundforchildren.org](mailto:info@globalfundforchildren.org)

### **Global Fund for Children UK Trust**

London, United Kingdom  
[uktrust@globalfundforchildren.org](mailto:uktrust@globalfundforchildren.org)

### **Foundation for Rebuilding Childhood**

New Delhi, India  
[info@foundationforrebuildingchildhood.org](mailto:info@foundationforrebuildingchildhood.org)

[globalfundforchildren.org](http://globalfundforchildren.org)



*Thank you to all the individuals from GFC's team, Board of Directors, Youth Leadership Council, community of partners, and allies who contributed their ideas and perspectives to this vision, and thank you for all you will continue to do to bring it to life.*

*Illustration: Ramya Ramakrishnan. Graphic Design: Mouse & Mind*