



Inclusive Language Guide

Guide for Embedding Asset-Framing Principles
in our Fundraising and Communications

Executive Summary

From Commitment to Practice

This guide translates Global Fund for Children’s (GFC) commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) into practical tools for everyday communications.

Co-created by GFC teams, TSIC, and Communicate Inclusively, it formalizes the dignity-centered storytelling that many teams already practice, offering a shared framework to deepen this work across the organization.

What Is Asset Framing?

Asset framing is a communication approach that recognizes people’s aspirations, strengths, and potential before describing the systemic barriers they navigate. For GFC, it is not simply a writing technique. It is a values-driven way of honoring the dignity, agency, and leadership of children, youth, and the community-led organizations we partner with worldwide.

- It is **not** about ignoring challenges, violence, or inequity.
- It is about ensuring that young people and communities are not defined solely by those experiences.
- It allows us to tell fuller, truthful stories where young people are agents of change and GFC plays a supportive, respectful role.

GFC's Five Core Principles for Asset-Framed Communications

1. **Center People, Not Problems:** Begin with strengths and actions. When naming barriers, describe systemic conditions (e.g., “inequitable funding”) rather than individual deficits.

2. **Honor Story Ownership:** Ensure those featured feel respected and represented. This requires informed consent and examining our own assumptions.
3. **Position GFC as a Partner and Catalyst:** We do not “save” or “fix.” We partner with and invest in community leaders who are already driving change.
4. **Use Language That Shifts Power:** Replace generic labels like “vulnerable” or “marginalized” with specific, dignity-affirming terms. Emphasize verbs of agency: leading, creating, advocating.
5. **Uphold Safeguarding and Responsibility:** Protection must coexist with dignity. Safeguarding should never result in the erasure of a young person's agency or voice.

How to Use This Guide

We designed this document for flexible, immediate application.

- **Drafting content right now?** Go directly to Appendix A: Implementation Toolkits for checklists and decision grids.
- **Writing a grant proposal?** Jump to Application Guide A for guidance on navigating donor requirements.
- **Creating social media content?** Jump to Application Guide C for platform-specific advice.
- **Reporting on impact?** Jump to Application Guide B for storytelling frameworks.
- **Wanting to understand the foundation?** Read Sections 1-2 for the principles, then explore the guides relevant to your work.

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How to Use This Guide

This guide builds on what GFC is already doing well in inclusive languages and asset-framing principles.

Through co-creation workshops from October to December 2025, GFC's communications and development teams, working with The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC) and Communicate Inclusively, identified strong asset-framing practices already happening across the organization. This guide helps formalize those practices and provide tools to apply them more consistently.

This Is a Journey, Not a Policy

Asset framing develops over time through experimentation, reflection, and collaboration. You don't need permission to be imperfect. What matters is the commitment to keep learning.

The goal isn't perfect language. It is authentic communication that honors the dignity and agency of young people and communities GFC serves.

Three Ways to Use This Guide

1. Quick Decision Support (5 minutes)

Need immediate guidance while drafting?

Jump to Appendix A: Toolkit, use the relevant checklist and return to principles only if you need context

2. Content-Specific Guidance (15-30 minutes)

Working on a specific communication type?

Go to the relevant Application Guide (Section 3):

- Guide A: Proposals & Donor Communications
- Guide B: Impact Reporting & Storytelling
- Guide C: Social Media & Public Communications
- Guide D: Global & Cultural Contexts

3. Deep Understanding (1-2 hours)

Want to fully integrate these principles?

Read Sections 1-2 for foundation, work through relevant Application Guides in Section 3, bookmark Section 4: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What Is Asset Framing?

“Asset framing is defining people by their aspirations and contributions before you talk about their challenges.”

– *Trabian Shorter*

“[Asset framing is] centering and empowering the people we serve,” “respecting the stories young people want to tell about themselves,” and “shifting the power dynamic between funders and beneficiaries.”

– *GFC Colleagues*

Asset framing is a communication approach that begins by recognizing people’s aspirations, strengths, and potential before describing the systemic barriers they navigate.

Trabian Shorter, who coined the term, explains: “Asset framing is defining people by their aspirations and contributions before you talk about their challenges.” This principle aligns deeply with Global Fund for Children’s (GFC’s) belief that every child and young person is capable, visionary, and full of promise.

For GFC, asset framing is not simply a writing technique, it is a values-driven way of honoring the dignity, agency, and leadership of children, youth, and the community-led organizations we partner with worldwide. It reflects our mission to help children and youth reach their full potential and advance their rights, and it mirrors our belief that change is most powerful when it is led from within communities.

In our co-design sessions, colleagues articulated asset framing as “centering and empowering the people we serve,” “respecting the stories young people want to tell about themselves,” and “shifting the power dynamic

between funders and beneficiaries.” Colleagues highlighted the importance of moving away from narratives that portray communities as powerless or in need of rescue, and instead reflecting the truth we see every day: young people who are resilient, hopeful, ambitious, and actively shaping their futures.

1.1. What Asset Framing Looks Like in Practice

Asset framing shifts how we talk about people and communities by placing their humanity, aspirations, and capabilities at the forefront.

In practice, it means:

- Describing young people by their dreams, talents, creativity, and leadership first.
- Recognizing community-led organizations as experts and innovators within their contexts.
- Naming structural barriers, such as inequality, violence, discrimination, migration pressures, or gender injustice, without defining people by them.
- Reflecting GFC’s role as a partner and resource that strengthens existing solutions, rather than presenting GFC as a savior or fixer.

This approach aligns with GFC’s photography ethos, which encourages uplifting, active, and hopeful images that illustrate courage, joy, and possibility rather than portraying children as passive or distressed.

1.2. What Asset Framing Is Not

To prevent misunderstanding, it is equally important to clarify what asset framing is not.

Asset framing does **not** mean:

- Ignoring or minimizing real challenges
- Avoiding discussions about violence, exclusion, or inequity
- Pretending everyone has equal access to safety or opportunity
- Downplaying the urgency of needs
- Erasing GFC's role as a meaningful partner
- Relying on "positive language" that glosses over structural injustice

Asset framing does not restrict us from talking about needs or barriers. It simply ensures that individuals and communities are not defined solely by them. It allows us to tell fuller, more truthful stories: stories where young people are agents of change, where community-led organizations lead the way, and where GFC plays a supportive, respectful role.

1.3. Why Asset Framing Matters for GFC

Asset framing matters for GFC because it reinforces who we are, how we partner, and what we believe about young people and their potential. It reflects our values, i.e., hopeful, global, bold, energized, and ensures our communications mirror the dignity and possibility that define our work.

A Natural Extension of GFC's Identity

GFC's mission and brand are deeply rooted in the idea that children and youth are strong, valued, and capable of shaping their own futures. Asset framing strengthens this

narrative by ensuring that our language consistently centers young people as leaders, not as passive recipients of support.

We believe that asset framing aligns with our responsibility to communities and young people and affirms that change comes from within communities. This aligns with our long-standing approach of investing in local leadership and trusting community-led organizations as experts in their own contexts.

Strengthening GFC's Storytelling, Partnership, and Influence

Asset framing enhances our ability to communicate impact in a way that honors our partners. It positions young people as leaders growing up in contexts shaped by inequality, rather than as "vulnerable" by default. It recognizes community-led organizations as innovators responding creatively to complex challenges.

Importantly, asset framing also strengthens fundraising. Instead of asking donors to "fix" communities, we invite them to join a partnership that amplifies existing leadership and potential. This framing resonates more deeply with today's donors, institutions, and allies who seek meaningful, equitable impact.

A Shared Language for the Organization

Using asset framing across GFC provides colleagues with a consistent, inclusive, and values-aligned way of representing young people, partners, and impact. It improves clarity, reduces unintentional harm, builds trust, and ensures that our communications reflect the dignity we see in every community.

Most importantly, asset framing helps us tell the story we believe in: a story of young people's brilliance and possibility, the strength of community-led solutions, and GFC's role in supporting change that is hopeful, systemic, and led by those closest to the work.

2. GFC's Core Principles for Asset-Framed Communications

These five principles translate the philosophy of asset framing into everyday communication habits for Global Fund for Children. They are designed to support colleagues across all teams; communications, programs, development, operations, and leadership, in creating writing, imagery, and storytelling that honors dignity, agency, and community leadership. Together, these principles help ensure our messages reflect GFC's global values of justice, partnership, and youth-centered change.

GFC's Five Core Principles for Asset-Framed Communications

1. Center People, Not Problems
2. Honor Story Ownership
3. Position GFC as a Partner and Catalyst
4. Use Language That Shifts Power
5. Uphold Safeguarding and Responsibility

Principle 1: Center People, Not Problems

What this means

Begin every story with people's strengths, aspirations, and possibilities, not the challenges they face. Focus on how young people and community-led organizations are acting, leading, imagining, and driving change. When naming barriers, describe the systemic conditions before describing individual experiences. People are not defined by the inequalities around them.

Reflective prompt

What strengths, ambitions, or actions should be at the center of this story?

Practical application

- Lead with human qualities: creativity, leadership, insight, ambition - before introducing context.
- Describe structural issues such as inequality, displacement, or discrimination before individual or community-level impact.
- Avoid labels like "at-risk" or "impoverished" that define people by external conditions.
- Highlight how communities respond, adapt, and innovate, not only what they experience.

Principle 2: Honor Story Ownership

What this means

Those featured in GFC content must feel respected, represented accurately, and proud to see their story shared. Story ownership means informed consent, co-creation where possible, and careful attention to who is shaping the narrative. It also involves examining our own assumptions, privileges, and cultural lenses.

Reflective prompt

Would this person or community feel respected and accurately represented in this story?

Practical application

- Always obtain informed consent and explain how a story will be used.
- Invite partners and young people to review or shape their narrative where feasible.
- Avoid assumptions; verify facts and context with community-led organizations.
- Use direct quotes whenever possible to maintain authenticity.
- Ask whether your interpretation adds unnecessary judgment or bias. Always do this in collaboration with the Marketing and Communications team who will provide the framework and guidance to collect stories that follow best practice.

Principle 3: Position GFC as a Partner and Catalyst

What this means

GFC does not “save” or “fix” communities. We partner with, learn from, and invest in community-led leaders who are already driving change. Communications should reflect a relationship rooted in collaboration, mutual respect, and shared growth, not hierarchy.

Reflective prompt

Does this language reinforce equal partnership and mutual learning?

Practical application

- Describe GFC’s role as supporting, learning from, and amplifying community leadership.
- Highlight how local leaders design solutions and shape program priorities.
- Avoid implying that progress happens because GFC intervened; instead show how GFC resources strengthen existing leadership.
- Share examples of how GFC has been transformed or influenced by partners’ expertise.

Principle 4: Use Language That Shifts Power

What this means

Language shapes perception and power. Use terms that reflect dignity, specificity, and fairness rather than generic labels. When “sector-standard” terms (e.g., vulnerable, marginalized) must be used for donors or reporting, provide context and work to influence understanding over time.

Reflective prompts

Who is centered in this framing and who benefits from it?

Does this story show how power or opportunity is being shared?

Practical application

- Use accurate, specific descriptors (e.g., “young people navigating displacement,” “activists advocating for gender justice”).
- Avoid labels that reduce people to a category (e.g., “the vulnerable,” “the marginalized”).
- Emphasize systemic factors, e.g., colonial histories, discrimination, economic inequality, over individual deficits.
- Use strength-based verbs: leading, organizing, creating, building, advocating, imagining.

Principle 5: Uphold Safeguarding and Responsibility

What this means

Protection and dignity must coexist. Communications should keep children, youth, and communities safe while ensuring their agency and leadership remain visible. Safeguarding does not mean erasing people but representing them responsibly.

Principle

Safety, dignity, and visibility must go together.

Safety and Cultural Adaptations

When safety, political context, or cultural norms require anonymity or adaptations, thoughtful adjustments are encouraged.

Reflective prompt

Does this story protect the individual while still honoring their agency and voice?

Practical application

- Follow all safeguarding protocols when gathering and sharing images, stories, and quotes.
- Apply the “Checkpoint Reflection”: If a story cannot be told without risking the physical safety or legal standing of a partner, even with anonymity, we should not use the story.
- Avoid overly anonymizing stories (e.g., removing all detail) that unintentionally erase agency.
- Ensure images reflect dignity and contain no distressing or exploitative visuals.
- Consider cultural and political contexts when deciding what details to include.
- When anonymity is necessary, focus on actions, strengths, and leadership rather than conditions or harm.

3. Application Guide

These four guides provide practical asset-framing applications for specific contexts. Each addresses the unique challenges of different communication types, from navigating donor expectations in proposals to maintaining dignity in social media's fast-paced environment. While core principles remain consistent, how you apply them shifts depending on your audience, channel, cultural context, and specific constraints.

You don't need to read all four guides sequentially. Start with the guide most relevant to your immediate work, use examples as starting points (not templates), and adapt them to your specific situation. Return to Section 2 (Core Principles) when you need a deeper understanding, and combine guidance across guides when needed. Many communications draw on multiple contexts.

What You'll Find in Each Guide

Guide A: Proposals & Donor Communications



It addresses the central tension in fundraising: how to articulate urgent needs and make compelling cases for support while maintaining dignity and avoiding savior narratives.

Guide B: Impact Reporting & Storytelling



It provides guidance on balancing systems-level evidence with human-centered narratives, ensuring stories honor both individual experiences and broader patterns of change.

Guide C: Social Media & Public Communications



It offers strategies for applying asset framing within the constraints of character limits, algorithms, and diverse global audiences across multiple platforms.

Guide D: Navigating Global & Cultural Contexts



It recognizes that asset framing looks different across GFC's 40+ countries of operation, providing guidance on adapting approaches while maintaining consistent principles.

Guide A: Proposals & Donor Communications

How to apply asset framing while meeting donor expectations and securing critical funding

Proposals and donor communications are where asset framing often feels most challenging. Colleagues need to meet donor requirements, respond to strict templates, and articulate urgency, often under intense time pressure, while still preserving dignity and centering agency. This section offers practical strategies for balancing fundraising needs with GFC’s commitment to respectful, equity-driven storytelling. It acknowledges that donor language, reporting frameworks, and “shopping list” fundraising formats sometimes require pragmatic decisions, and provides tools to navigate these constraints with integrity.

These principles and techniques aim to empower colleagues to secure funding **without compromising GFC’s identity, values, or the dignity of young people and community-led partners.**

A. Sequence Strategically: Vision → Barriers → Solutions

Asset framing in proposals is not about avoiding challenges. It’s about deciding when and how those challenges appear. Research shows (and GFC has seen in practice) that starting with vision and agency helps shift perceptions from crisis to possibility and positions communities as leaders rather than victims.

Recommended Structure

1. Lead with what is possible.
2. Explain the systemic barriers.
3. Describe how donor investment strengthens solutions already in motion.

This keeps agency front and center while still presenting a compelling case for funding.

Example (Generic Template)

Instead of:

“Communities in X face extreme poverty and instability. Young people lack access to education. We need funding to support them.”

Asset-framed sequence:

“Young people in X are leading change by strengthening education access, organizing peer support networks, and creating community-led solutions.

Systemic barriers, including political instability, school closures, and inequitable funding, limit the reach of their work.

With your support, GFC can invest in and expand these youth-driven initiatives, helping them reach more children and build long-term resilience.”

*Example using GFC materials
(Ukraine Trust Fund Concept Note)*

The concept note highlights youth leadership:

“Ukraine’s young people are... the architects of [the country’s] future.”

A proposal could follow the recommended sequence:

Vision:

“Ukrainian youth are driving community rebuilding, leading humanitarian initiatives, and championing peacebuilding efforts.”

Barriers:

“Yet the war has disrupted education, strained mental health, displaced millions, and limited access to sustained funding.”

Solution:

“Your investment ensures that youth-led and community-led organizations have the flexible resources, safety, and capacity they need to continue leading Ukraine’s recovery.”

B. Work with Donor Language Without Losing Integrity

Many donors use deficit-based language (“the vulnerable,” “marginalized groups,” “victims,” “poor communities”).

Proposals often require alignment with this terminology to pass eligibility checks or meet compliance criteria.

Asset framing DOES allow you to mirror donor language, IF you contextualize it.

Two-step approach

1. Acknowledge the use of donor terminology.
2. Clarify GFC’s interpretation and values.

Example — Proposal Opening Statement

“To align with your framework, this proposal uses terms such as ‘vulnerable populations.’ At Global Fund for Children, we use this terminology to meet reporting requirements, while centering the strengths, leadership, and agency of young people and their communities.”

This maintains integrity and transparency.

Example from donor communications: “Will you join us?” email (Feb 5, 2025)

The email describes sudden aid cuts and “escalating needs.”

An asset-framing adjustment for donors might be:

“These cuts are directly affecting community-led partners who are leading humanitarian responses. We describe these challenges using widely recognized language, while maintaining our commitment to portraying the leadership and strength of the young people and communities we serve.”

This explains the choice while preserving respect.

C. Use Shopping Lists (itemized cost descriptions) Responsibly: Investment, Not Charity

Short, tangible cost descriptions (“£10 provides...”) remain one of the most effective fundraising tools. However, traditional lists often frame giving as **transactional** (e.g., buying a sandwich to fix a hunger deficit).

Asset framing shifts the ask to **transformational** investment. We are not asking donors to “save” a beneficiary; we are asking them to invest in a system of community leadership that is already working.

Instead of (charity framing): “£10 feeds a child”

- **Implies:** The child is passive/helpless; the donor is the hero/savior.

Asset-framed version: “£10 provides resources young leaders use to create safe learning spaces for children.”

- **Implies:** The solution is locally led; the donor is the partner fueling the engine.

Real GFC Example — 30th Anniversary Letter (2024)

The direct mail letter highlights youth-led change, including Gitta’s advocacy in Sierra Leone.

A shopping list for this appeal could read:

- **£25** invests in training for young advocates like Gitta who are mobilizing their communities.
- **£100** equips a community-led organization to run peer support activities for girls.

Why this works: It positions the funds as capital that Gitta uses to drive change, rather than a direct service GFC or partner delivers to a passive recipient. It keeps the power with the young person, not the donor.

D. Managing Constraints: When Word Counts, Templates, and Donor Requirements Limit Options

Donor templates often force deficit language, detailed needs assessments, or problem-heavy sections. You can still apply asset framing through strategic placement.

Tips for constrained formats

- **Lead with a short asset-framed summary** even if the next question is deficit-based.
- **Use deficits only where required**, not as the tone of the entire proposal.
- **Attribute challenges to systems**, not individuals.
- **Bring agency back wherever possible**, even in technical sections.

Example with a strict donor question

Donor requirement:

“Describe the vulnerabilities of the target population.”

Asset-framed answer:

“Young people in X are leading community initiatives in education and mental health. They do so while navigating systemic barriers such as disrupted schooling, limited economic opportunities, and inequitable funding. These conditions increase risk and undermine wellbeing, particularly for young people who are displaced or facing discrimination.”

This meets the requirement but still centers agency.

E. When Space Is Tight: One-Sentence Asset-Framed Examples

Principle

When limited to one sentence, prioritize *who is acting* and *what is being strengthened*, rather than leading with need alone.

Example

Instead of:

“Vulnerable young people affected by conflict urgently need support.”

Asset-framed version:

“Young people affected by conflict are leading recovery efforts in their communities, and GFC’s support strengthens their capacity to sustain education, wellbeing, and local leadership.”

Instead of:

“Children in crisis settings lack access to safe education and protection.”

Asset-framed version:

“Children and youth in crisis settings are sustaining learning and peer support despite disruption, and GFC invests in community-led organizations that enable this continuity.”

F. Navigating Donor Algorithms and Required Language

Some large institutional funders use automated screening tools or AI-assisted reviews that scan for specific deficit-based keywords such as “vulnerable,” “at-risk,” or “victim.” Proposals that do not include these terms may risk being deprioritized or filtered out before human review.

This is a structural constraint not a values failure.

Use required keywords without letting them lead the narrative.

Recommended approach:

- Include required donor language once where necessary (e.g. in problem statements or form-restricted fields).
- Balance this by:
 - Leading the overall narrative with agency and leadership.
 - Pairing deficit language with asset-framed clarification.
 - Avoiding repetition or over-reliance on deficit terms.

Example

Example: Keyword + Asset Clarifier

“This program supports vulnerable children affected by conflict, recognizing vulnerability as a product of systemic conditions, while centering young people’s leadership, resilience, and capacity to drive change when given equitable resources.”

Optional Footnote or Language Note

Where proposals allow footnotes, annexes, or methodology notes, colleagues are encouraged to include a short clarification such as:

Language Note:

GFC uses terms such as “vulnerable” where necessary for alignment with funding frameworks. However, our organizational approach is grounded in asset-based framing, recognizing that vulnerability is created by systems and contexts, not by inherent deficits in children or communities.

This approach:

- *Meets donor and algorithmic requirements*
- *Protects GFC’s values and narrative integrity*
- *Signals intentional, ethical storytelling to human reviewers*

G. Demonstrate Impact Through Leadership, Not Deficit

Funders want impact. Asset framing ensures impact is presented as **community-led progress**, not rescue narratives.

Example

Example from the Impact Report (Thriving Through Play)

Children “build mental health resilience... even in crisis-affected settings.”

Asset-framed proposal version:

“Children participating in Thriving Through Play are strengthening emotional resilience, deepening social connection, and using play as a tool for healing, demonstrating leadership and adaptability despite the pressures of displacement.”

H. Position GFC as a Catalyst in Donor Narratives

Donor communications often require highlighting GFC’s role. Use this to reinforce partnership, not savior dynamics.

If a quote is used, this is the recommended structural pattern.

Quote → Context → Asset-Framed Interpretation

This sequence:

- Honors the partner’s voice.
- Explains why the quote exists.
- Reframes power at the systems level.

Example

Example from the Ukraine Narrative Report

Partners describe GFC’s support as “life-saving” and “the difference between closing and continuing.”

Asset-framed versions:

Option 1

“GFC’s support was life-saving. It was the difference between closing and continuing.”

Partners used this language to describe the stakes they were navigating. During sustained blackouts, displacement, and infrastructure attacks, community-led organizations exercised leadership under extreme conditions. GFC’s flexible funding model strengthened their ability to adapt operations, protect staff, and continue youth-led services without interruption.

Why this works

- *The emotional intensity remains intact*
- *Agency is attributed to partners’ decision-making and leadership*
- *GFC’s value is positioned as enabling resilience, not replacing it*

Option 2

(Effective for proposals where space is limited)

Community-led partners described GFC’s support as “life-saving” and “the difference between closing and continuing,” reflecting the operational autonomy that flexible funding enabled during crisis conditions, including displacement, power outages, and targeted infrastructure attacks.

I. Putting It All Together: Before and After

Before (common fundraising approach)

“Children in crisis face unimaginable trauma. Without urgent help, they risk falling further behind. Our partners need your support to provide basic services.”

After (asset-framed fundraising language)

“Young people are creating solutions in their communities, building safe spaces, supporting peers, and sustaining hope even in crisis.

Systemic barriers like conflict and disrupted schooling limit their reach.

Your investment strengthens community-led responses and expands the impact of young people’s leadership.”

J. Summary: Best Practices for Asset-Framed Proposals & Donor Comms

- ✓ Start with vision, leadership, and possibility.
- ✓ Describe systemic barriers, not personal deficits.
- ✓ Balance donor language with transparent values.
- ✓ Frame costs as investment in potential, not charity.
- ✓ Use confined spaces strategically and lead with dignity.
- ✓ Reflect community leadership in impact stories.
- ✓ Protect agency and ownership even in urgent appeals.

Spotlight: The Survivor-led Activism Fund

Context

When developing the Survivor-led Activism Fund (SAF), we faced a key communication challenge: how to secure institutional funding while positioning survivors of child sexual abuse and violence (CSA/V) as the experts and leaders they are, rather than as victims requiring rescue.

What We Did

We embedded asset-framing principles throughout all funder-facing materials from the very beginning by leading with survivors’ strengths, leadership, and strategic vision, positioning them as experts driving systemic change rather than as victims in need of rescue. We emphasized that they are already creating solutions, organizing movements, and shaping discourse globally. The Fund’s purpose was framed as resourcing, amplifying, and connecting this thriving ecosystem of survivor-led activism, recognizing the existing efforts of the community.

Our Progress reports further reinforced asset framing by presenting survivor insight as the engine of the Fund’s evolution. When timelines, staffing decisions, or grantmaking strategies shifted, we communicated these adjustments as reflections of survivor guidance and ecosystem learning, not as setbacks. Reports celebrate survivor-led decision-making, the emergence of new leaders, and the strengthening of grassroots networks.

We presented trauma-informed design, language justice, and accessible participation as intentional investments that strengthen survivor leadership and expand the movement’s power.

Impact

This approach has enabled us to secure significant institutional funding while maintaining survivor leadership at the center of all decision-making. By consistently centering survivor expertise in our funder communications, we model an asset-framed narrative that challenges traditional philanthropic power dynamics and invites funders into a paradigm of survivor-defined systems change.

Guide B: Impact Reporting & Storytelling

How to balance systems-level evidence with human-centered narratives while ensuring ethical, dignified storytelling

Impact reporting and storytelling are central to how Global Fund for Children communicates progress, demonstrates accountability, and strengthens relationships with funders and partners. This section provides practical guidance on using asset framing to craft reporting and stories that uplift dignity, convey systemic understanding, and remain anchored in evidence, not sensationalism.

The goal is to balance **data + context + human narrative** in a way that accurately reflects the complexity of GFC's work across 40+ countries.

A. Combine Systems-Level Evidence with Individual Narratives

Impact reporting often requires both quantitative evidence and compelling stories. Asset framing helps you integrate these elements without over-relying on individual narratives or inadvertently centering trauma.

Best-practice sequence

1. Start with systems-level findings (cohort impact, trends, ecosystem shifts).
2. Move to a narrative that illustrates the system change.
3. Close with what the story reveals about broader change.

This approach prevents stories from doing all the emotional labor and avoids giving funders the impression that a single case represents an entire community.

Example

Example using the Global Impact Study (Fall 2025 Impact Report)

Systems evidence:

"GFC's flexible funding, customized support, and trust-based approach consistently contribute to the growth and sustainability of partner organizations... leading to improved education access, reduced violence, and increased community wellbeing."

Narrative illustration:

"GFC's flexible funding, customized support, and trust-based approach consistently contribute to the growth and sustainability of partner organizations... For example, in Zimbabwe, Do It for the Kids uses play-based arts to help boys express emotion, strengthen emotional resilience, and build connection. Their work demonstrates how creativity becomes a tool for healing and leadership in crisis-affected settings."

Link back to system:

This individual example reflects the wider pattern identified in the Impact Study: when partners have flexible resources and relational support, they can design culturally rooted solutions that help young people thrive, even in contexts of crisis.

Why this works

- The data holds the narrative, not the reverse.
- Individual stories illustrate (not replace) system change.
- The result is credible, respectful, and emotionally resonant.

B. Tell Success Stories with Nuance and Dignity

Asset framing encourages stories that convey progress, leadership, and agency, not simplistic “from tragedy to triumph” arcs.

Core principles for nuanced storytelling

- Show the journey, not only the outcome.
- Attribute change to the young people/community, not GFC.
- Avoid implying individuals succeeded despite their context because of GFC.
- Include structural forces where relevant.
- Represent setbacks, complexity, or ongoing challenges when appropriate.

Example

Example from the Ukraine Narrative Report

Nazar’s story describes how supported living improved independence for a young man with autism.

Common deficit approach:

“Nazar struggled with social skills until he joined the Center.”

Nuanced, asset-framed version:

“Nazar contributes actively to daily routines and is developing new relationships and independence through the Center’s supportive environment. His mother reflects that the consistency and respect he receives there have helped their entire family build greater stability.”

Why this works

- Nazar is centered as a person, not a condition.
- The system (supported living environment) is recognized.
- The story honors agency, family insight, and relational growth.

C. Attribute Success to Communities and Young People, Not GFC

GFC’s role is catalytic, not central. Asset-framed storytelling describes how GFC supports partners, not as the driver of change.

Example

Example from Thriving Through Play (Fall 2025 Impact Report)

Colleagues highlight how partners use play-based methods to support children’s wellbeing.

Instead of:

“GFC is transforming mental health outcomes for children through play.”

Use:

“Community-led partners across Kenya and Uganda are using play to strengthen children’s mental health and build resilience. GFC’s support helps expand these local innovations.”

Why this works

- Positions communities as experts.
- Shows GFC’s role clearly, without centering it.
- Accurately reflects the funding relationship and power dynamics.

D. Ethical Storytelling: Protecting Dignity While Preserving Agency

This is non-negotiable. GFC’s storytelling must safeguard children and young people while ensuring they remain visible and empowered.

Ethical Storytelling Checklist

Use this before publishing:

- Would the person feel proud and safe to see this?
- Have we obtained informed consent (directly or via partners)?
- Have we verified accuracy through partners or individuals?
- Are we unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes?
- Is the context clear? Does it avoid implying personal blame?
- Are we showing action, strength, or leadership not just need?
- Do we need to adapt details or anonymize to protect safety?

Example

Example of ethical adaptation

The Ukraine Narrative Report includes sensitive content about displacement, trauma, and disability.

Ethical adaptation could look like:

- Using pseudonyms
- Omitting identifiable locations
- Emphasizing actions, routines, and agency
- Avoiding descriptors that reduce individuals to their trauma

Asset-framed revision example:

“Twelve individuals who previously lived in institutions now run their own households, make decisions about daily routines, and choose how to

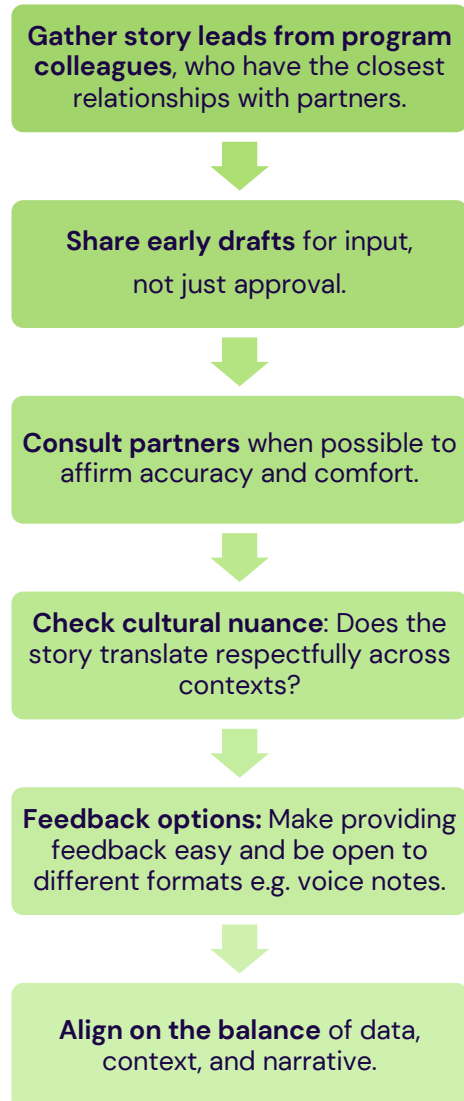
participate in community life. GFC partners support them with the structures and care needed to grow their independence.”

This protects identity and centers agency.

E. Build Internal Feedback Loops for Accuracy and Respect

Impact reporting often requires multiple voices: program teams, communications, leadership, and partners. Asset framing encourages collaboration for accuracy and dignity.

Recommended process



Why this matters

- Prevents misrepresentation.
- Ensures dignity.
- Strengthens internal trust.
- Aligns reporting with lived realities.
- Encourages shared ownership across teams.

Story Patterns to Avoid (and What to Use Instead)

✘ Avoid

- “Against all odds” savior narratives.
- Trauma-forward introductions.
- Describing people as “vulnerable” without specifying *to what*.
- Stories where GFC appears central to success.
- Stories that flatten identities (e.g., “refugees,” “the poor,” “victims”).
- Information-heavy reports that ignore human experience.

✔ Use

- “Leadership in context” narratives.
- Stories showing community-led strategies.
- Collective outcomes (peer groups, cohorts, community solutions).
- Descriptions of systemic barriers shaping context.
- Hopeful, future-oriented framing.
- Nuanced evidence (quant + qual + story).

F. Asset Framing During Active War or Crises

In contexts of active war or widely recognized humanitarian crises, it is important to acknowledge that direct language is sometimes clearer, more honest, and more appropriate than softened reframing. When audiences already understand that a war is underway, avoiding the reality of conflict can feel evasive, dilute urgency, or obscure the seriousness of the situation.

Asset framing in these contexts is not about downplaying violence, displacement, or loss. Instead, it is about how

those realities are described and what else is held alongside them. Directly naming war, occupation, bombing, or displacement can be both accurate and necessary, particularly in proposals, impact reporting, and public communications where credibility and urgency matter.

The key distinction is this: *Name the crisis clearly, but do not reduce people to the crisis alone.*

Practical Guidance

- It is appropriate to explicitly reference war, invasion, or conflict when these are central and widely understood.
- Asset framing should focus on avoiding trauma-only narratives, not avoiding the truth.
- Where direct language is used, balance it by showing how people are responding, organizing, leading, and sustaining daily life under extreme conditions.

Example: Balancing Direct Language with Asset Framing

Over-softened framing (can feel evasive in active war contexts):

“Young people in eastern Ukraine are rebuilding routines, friendships, and learning environments amidst ongoing instability.”

Balanced approach (recommended):

“As war continues in eastern Ukraine, young people are rebuilding routines, friendships, and learning environments, demonstrating leadership and resilience despite ongoing violence and displacement.”

Why this works:

- *Clearly names the war.*
- *Maintains urgency and credibility.*
- *Preserves agency and avoids trauma-only framing.*

G. Putting It All Together: Before and After

Before (typical charity framing)

“War has devastated communities. Children are traumatized and need urgent help. GFC is helping them rebuild their lives.”

After (asset-framed, systems-aware, ethical)

“Young people across Ukraine continue leading community responses, from creating safe learning spaces to coordinating support networks, even as conflict disrupts daily life. Community-led organizations are sustaining these efforts with courage and creativity. GFC’s flexible support strengthens their resilience and expands the reach of these youth-driven solutions.”

H. Summary: Impact Reporting & Storytelling Best Practices

- ✓ Start with system-level evidence.
- ✓ Use narratives to illustrate, not represent, the system.
- ✓ Attribute leadership to communities and young people
- ✓ Embrace nuance and complexity.
- ✓ Center dignity, safety, and consent.
- ✓ Avoid stereotype reinforcement.
- ✓ Balance data and story with intentionality.
- ✓ Test accuracy through internal and partner feedback.
- ✓ Use active, hopeful, strength-based language.

Spotlight: Telling the Stories of Courage, Dignity, and Sustainability Award Winners

Context

When telling the stories of our 2025 Courage, Dignity, and Sustainability Award winners, we wanted to ensure our storytelling process genuinely centered partners as experts of their own work and lived realities. This process prioritizes ownership, consent, and safeguarding at every stage.

What We Did

We used a co-creation approach that put partners in control at every stage.

Beginning with Listening and Boundaries

We began by reaching out directly to award recipients for one-on-one calls to learn about their work in their own words, including what motivated them, the impact they were creating in their communities, and what the recognition meant to them. During these initial conversations, partners often shared what aspects of their stories should or shouldn't be included.

For example, one partner shared that the personal circumstances surrounding the founding of their organization were private and should not be included in the blog. This guidance shaped the narrative from the beginning, leading us to focus the story on the organization's mission, leadership, and impact rather than personal story. In another case, a young activist clearly outlined which aspects of their personal life they did not want highlighted publicly.

Drafting Using Asset-Framing Principles

Following each discussion, we draft a blog that reflects the partner's voice, values, and priorities, with care taken to frame their work through an asset-based lens that highlights leadership, innovation, and resilience rather than deficit or struggle.

For example, when writing about Colectivo Vida Digna in Guatemala, we described them as “a Mayan organization, with deep roots in the Mayan heritage and culture”, leading with its cultural identity and strength. When writing about YOH in the UK, we were intentional about language: “YOH doesn't see these children as problems to fix, but as individuals with potential.” This directly names and rejects deficit framing while affirming the young people's agency and capability.

Collaborative Review and Partner Control

Drafts were always shared with partners for review before publication. We invited feedback, clarifications, and edits, and incorporated their input fully. Revised versions were re-shared to ensure partners felt accurately represented and comfortable with how their story was told. We applied this same collaborative process to social media content, recognizing that short-form storytelling also carries power.

Once assets were published, we shared all links directly with partners so they could choose how and where to amplify the content within their own networks. At every stage, partners retained agency over their narratives.

Impact

This approach ensured our award storytelling was ethical, accurate, and relationship-driven, reinforcing trust while honoring the leadership and expertise of the organizations we work alongside.

We recognize that asset-framing is an ongoing practice, not a one-time achievement. While our co-creation process helped us lead with partner strengths, we continue learning how to improve. The co-creation process itself is perhaps our strongest asset-framing practice: by positioning partners as the authors and experts of their own stories, we model the power-sharing and dignity that asset-framing requires.

Guide C: Social Media & Public Communications

Social media is one of the most visible forms of GFC’s communication. It is where algorithms, speed, and audience expectations meet our commitment to dignity, accuracy, and ethical storytelling. This section provides practical guidance for applying asset framing when posting on platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube.

GFC’s current social channels already embody many elements of asset framing

Strong, values-aligned messaging	Celebrating community-led achievements	Sector-facing leadership on LinkedIn
<p>Instagram bio:</p> <p>“We’re on a mission to create a safer and fairer world for all children.”</p> <p><i>This establishes purpose and values without centering crisis or deficit.</i></p>	<p>Recent Instagram post:</p> <p>“The verdict is in: Trust-based, flexible funding WORKS for grassroots organizations. How do we know? Because we asked them.”</p> <p><i>This centers evidence, partner voice, and the value of collaboration.</i></p>	<p>Recent LinkedIn post:</p> <p>“Our funding model is all about shifting the power of philanthropy.”</p> <p><i>This positions GFC as a systems-level actor supporting community-led change.</i></p>

These examples demonstrate that asset framing is not only possible but thriving within platform constraints.

A. Core Principles for Social Media Storytelling

Lead with strengths, not struggle

Algorithms change frequently. They currently reward immediacy and emotional impact, but that does not mean content has to rely on deficit narratives. GFC can break through noise by leading with achievements, agency, and possibility, not tragedy.

Example

Instead of:

“Children living in extreme poverty face daily hardship.”

Try:

“Young people in Lagos are leading after-school creative projects that are transforming their communities.”

“Asset framing doesn’t mean boring. Lead with compelling achievements, not tragic circumstance.”

B. Breaking Through Algorithms with Dignity

Social media currently rewards visuals, momentum, and emotion. Use this to uplift, not diminish.

What works well within asset framing:

- **Videos of young people in action** (e.g., dancing, campaigning, organizing community projects).
- **Quotes** from youth or partner staff.
- **Before/after** stories that focus on growth rather than hardship.
- **Short narrative threads** connecting strengths → barrier → response.
- **Infographics** that highlight community-led solutions.
- **Partner-led content** reshared with credit.

Example Post (Instagram)

“‘We wanted girls in our community to feel safe walking home.’

Today, young leaders at @PartnerOrg in Nepal launched their second community safety audit. They’re gathering data, speaking with families, and leading solutions and we’re proud to walk alongside them.”

This centers young people as actors, not recipients.

C. Audience Considerations: Tailoring Your Approach

GFC can use different approaches for different audiences.

General audiences (e.g., Instagram, Facebook):

- Keep language simple and human.
- Avoid jargon (e.g., “capacity strengthening,” “ecosystem shifts”).
- Focus on individual or community-level action.
- Use warm, accessible tone.

Example

“These young changemakers in Mexico are transforming local attitudes towards gender equality through theater.”

Sector audiences (e.g., LinkedIn):

- Can handle more nuance, policy language, and systems thinking.
- Good for emphasizing models, methodologies, and partner leadership.
- Ideal for promoting research, learning, or advocacy work.

Example

“GFC’s flexible funding approach continues to strengthen locally led child protection systems across South Asia. In 2024, partners led 17 advocacy initiatives that shaped regional policy.”

D. Simplifying Without Flattening

Social media requires brevity, but complexity can be maintained with precision.

Practical techniques:

- Highlight **one key insight** or theme per post.
- Use carousels to tell stories in “chapters”.
- Use threads or multi-slide content for deeper explanation.
- Link to full articles or reports for additional context.
- Use captions to add detail beyond short text overlays.

Example (carousel storyboard)

- **Slide 1:** “How young people in Ghana are reshaping education access”
- **Slide 2:** “Meet the youth-led organization behind the change”
- **Slide 3:** “Here’s how they partnered with schools to create solutions”
- **Slide 4:** “Here’s why GFC invests long-term in locally led innovation”

E. Ethical Visual Storytelling

Focus on images that show “agency, action, and context” but not victimhood.

✓ **Do**

- Use images of young people **doing**, creating, leading, speaking.
- Choose photos where people look comfortable, confident, or joyful.
- Highlight community-led spaces, workshops, events, and achievements.
- Include consent and safeguarding checks.
- Prefer partner-generated images where culturally appropriate.

✗ **Avoid**

- Photos of children crying or in distress.
- Passive or helpless poses (e.g., staring sadly at the camera).
- Images that highlight unsafe or traumatic environments.
- Photos that could expose identities in sensitive contexts.

Example (good visual caption)

“Young leaders in Guatemala facilitating their weekly girls’ rights workshop, designed and run entirely by them.”

Examples of Asset-Framed Social Media Copy

Example 1: Celebrating Partners (LinkedIn)

“We’re proud to partner with @YouthHorizonsSriLanka as they launch a new youth-led mental health network. Their innovative peer support model is already transforming how young people access care.”

Example 2: Story Highlight (Instagram)

“Every Friday, teens in rural Kenya gather to co-design community projects. From clean water campaigns to tech clubs, they’re shaping the future and we’re honored to support their vision.”

Captioning Photos: Practical Guidance for Clarity, Dignity, and Accessibility

Captions play a critical role in shaping how people, communities, and places are understood, particularly on social media, where images often travel faster than context. Thoughtful captioning helps preserve dignity, avoids misrepresentation, and supports accessibility for all audiences.

This is especially important when posts include multiple photos, multiple people, or multiple locations.

Core Principles for Photo Captions

- **Name people where consent is given**
Naming recognizes agency and contribution. Avoid reducing people to roles or conditions alone.
- **Be specific, not extractive**
Describe what is happening and why it matters without turning the image into a spectacle of hardship.
- **Separate storytelling from identifiers**
Keep narrative captions readable, and place names/locations in a clear, consistent format.
- **Support accessibility**
Clear captions work alongside (not instead of) alt text and help audiences who rely on screen readers or contextual cues.

Recommended Structure for Captions (Especially with Multiple Images)

Option 1: Story First, Identifiers at the End

Use the main caption to tell the story, then list names, locations, or organizations clearly at the bottom.

Example

Young people are leading community learning spaces that bring creativity, peer support, and stability during times of disruption. These moments reflect leadership, collaboration, and care already in action, strengthened through locally driven partnerships.

Photo details:

1. Amina and Samuel, youth facilitators – Kampala, Uganda
2. Community learning session – Lviv, Ukraine
3. Youth-led art workshop – Beirut, Lebanon

Why this works:

- Keeps the narrative human and engaging.
- Prevents overcrowding the main caption.
- Makes it easy for audiences to understand who and where, without guesswork.

Option 2: Numbered References (For Carousels)

For carousel posts, match caption references to image order.

Example

Across these communities, young people are creating spaces for learning, healing, and leadership, often with limited resources but strong collective commitment.

Images:

1. Youth-led mentoring circle – Bogotá, Colombia
2. Peer educators facilitating a workshop – Accra, Ghana
3. Community organizers sharing reflections – Pristina, Kosovo

When Names or Locations Cannot Be Shared

If naming is not appropriate due to safety, privacy, or consent:

Use transparent alternatives, such as:

- “Youth facilitators from a partner organization in eastern Europe”
- “Community organizers participating in a locally led program”

Avoid vague phrasing that removes agency (e.g. “beneficiaries” without context).

Quick Checklist for Colleagues

Before posting, ask:

- Have we identified people and places clearly where possible?
- Does the caption reinforce agency rather than anonymity or deficit?
- Are multiple images easy to understand without confusion?
- Would the people pictured feel respected by this description?

This approach ensures captions are clear, ethical, accessible, and aligned with asset-framed storytelling, while remaining practical for fast-paced social media workflows.

F. Using GFC’s Organizational Voice on Social Media

Social media should reflect GFC’s tone:

Optimistic, grounded, respectful, global, and youth-centered.

From the GFC Mission and Vision, the following messages translate well to social media formats:

- “We partner with courageous community-based organizations advancing children’s rights.”
- “Young people are leading change in their communities. We help create the conditions for their leadership to flourish.”
- “Our flexible funding strengthens organizations that are transforming children’s and youths’ lives.”

Quick Plug-and-Play Templates

Template 1 — Partner Spotlight:

“Meet our partner @_____. They’re creating bold, community-led solutions to [issue]. Here’s how they’re transforming the lives of young people.”

Template 2 — Youth Leadership:

“Youth are not just the future. They’re leading today. Here’s how young activists in [country] are driving change.”

Template 3 — GFC Value Add:

“At GFC, we invest in local organizations because they know their communities best. Our support helps them deepen their impact and grow their movements.”

G. Platform-Specific Tips

Instagram

- Prioritize dynamic video content.
- Use short captions with a clear CTA: “Learn more in our link in bio”.
- Include partner tags where possible.
- Use accessible language suited for global audiences.

LinkedIn

- Best for system-level insights, learning, thought leadership.
- Ideal for sharing GFC research, event reflections, and partner achievements.
- Avoid overly emotional or informal tone but stay professional and reflective.

Facebook

- Good for storytelling, resharing partner updates, and community building.
- Longer captions acceptable; photos + quotes are effective.

H. Navigating Public Communications Beyond Social Media

Press Releases & Blogs

- Lead with community-led achievements.
- Use clear language that reflects GFC’s mission.
- Ensure quotes from partners are used authentically and contextually.

Public Speaking or Interviews

- Ground your message in core values: dignity, community leadership, youth agency.
- Avoid overclaiming what GFC does. Instead, spotlight partners and young people.
- Use clear examples and avoid jargon.

Example Soundbite (consistent with GFC messaging)

“GFC partners with courageous local organizations because they have the vision, expertise, and community trust to transform children’s and youths’ lives.”

I. Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

Pitfall	What to Do Instead
Over-focusing on problems	Lead with what communities are doing to address challenges
Overusing labels (e.g., ‘vulnerable youth’)	Add specificity and context (e.g., ‘young people facing displacement due to conflict’)
Flattening complexity	Use carousels, threads, or links for nuance
Citing partners without credit	Always name the organization when safe
Posting images without context	Add captions that highlight agency and action

Social media and public communications offer powerful opportunities to model the dignity-first, asset-framed storytelling that GFC champions. By leading with agency, centering partners, and using formats that work with algorithms (not against them), GFC can tell stories that resonate widely without compromising integrity.

Spotlight: COP30 Social Media Coverage: Amplifying Youth Climate Leadership

Context

Our social media coverage of COP30 focused on amplifying the voices of young people at the event. A theme prevalent in COP discussions is how historically the people most affected by climate change have been excluded from decision-making spaces. This influenced our approach. It felt important to recognize the systematic exclusion of young people (particularly those from Indigenous communities) while amplifying their voices and experiences.

What We Did

Rather than creating content about young people at COP30, we co-created content with them.

Nan's Instagram Takeover

Nan, a Southeast Asia Spark Fund grantee, hosted a takeover of our Instagram stories during COP30. Every photograph and caption came directly from her. We simply amplified her voice. It was important for Nan to feel she was taking the lead, sharing her thoughts in a way that felt natural to her. Our only role was to offer guidance if needed.

The content felt really youthful and natural, not planned and scripted (because it wasn't!). We received 55 engagements on the series, which was a high level for our followers.

Working with Nan has given us a great reference point for future work with young people. It shows them that their content doesn't need to look polished or use GFC branding

and language. It can be authentic, reflecting who they are with their voice at the center.

Thalita's Multilingual Voice

Our colleague Thalita sent us video content sharing her perspectives on COP30 in which she spoke in Portuguese (her native language). We did not ask her to record a version in English; instead, we arranged translation. This shows we are a truly global organization and people do not have to speak English to have their voices heard. We also pulled out Thalita's quotes from press articles to share on LinkedIn and Instagram, further amplifying her voice. Stories about Thalita received 38 engagements.

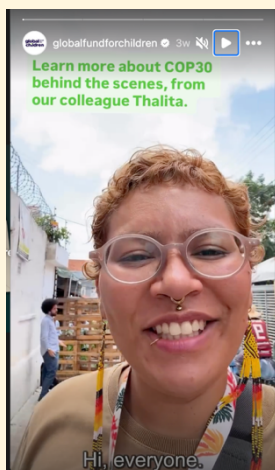
Asset-Framing in Action

Our main post on COP30 used asset-framing language, exemplifying this approach: "While young, Indigenous, Quilombola and Black Brazilians lead Brazil's climate action, colonial structures systematically exclude them from resources and decision-making spaces."

This puts people and their strengths before the problem and highlights that it's the colonial structures that have excluded them, but not a lack of action.

Impact

The COP30 coverage was a good example of co-creating content, meaning we can be confident the people featured would be happy to have their stories told this way. The content successfully acknowledged historical exclusion while keeping young people's leadership, expertise, and action at the center of the narrative.



Guide D: Navigating Global & Cultural Contexts

GFC works across more than 40 countries, each with its own languages, histories, political realities, expectations of formality, and cultural norms. This means that inclusive language and asset framing cannot be applied using a single universal script. Instead, GFC uses core principles that travel everywhere and adapts tone, terminology, and storytelling approaches to each regional context.

This section provides guidance on how to honor global diversity while maintaining the dignity-first, agency-centered approach at the heart of asset framing.

A. Why Cultural Context Matters

Language that is empowering in one context may be inappropriate, unsafe, or misunderstood in another. Identity terms, political implications, and even tone (direct vs. indirect communication) can vary widely across regions.

Examples:

- **LGBTQ+ identities in Liberia:** openly naming sexual orientation or gender identity may expose individuals to harm. Sometimes not naming is an act of asset framing, protecting dignity and safety while honoring lived experiences.
- **Gender terminology in South Asia:** “female-identifying youth” may be unfamiliar; “girls and young women” may be clearer and more culturally grounded.
- **Talking about race in Latin America:** Race is often conceptualized differently; “Afro-descendant” or “Indigenous young people” may be appropriate in some contexts but oversimplifying in others.
- **Migration in the Balkans or MENA region:** Terms like “refugee” carry legal, political, and emotional weight; alternative phrasing such as “young people affected by displacement” may be safer and more respectful.

Understanding these nuances prevents harm, builds trust, and ensures GFC’s global communications feel relevant and dignified.

B. Principles for Adapting Language Across Regions

1. Let partners guide contextual choices.
2. Hold core values, adapt tactics.
3. Avoid imposing Western frameworks.
4. Protect people in restrictive political environments.
5. Focus on shared humanity and universal strengths.

Principle 1 — Let partners guide contextual choices

Local organizations understand risks, sensitivities, and community expectations deeply.

“Work with partners to understand cultural nuances.”

Before using identity terms, describing systems, or sharing stories, consult with the partner for what is safe, respectful, and accurate.

Principle 2 — Hold core values, adapt tactics

“Be clear about values, flexible about tactics.”

GFC’s values (dignity, agency, safety, respect, community leadership) do not change across regions but the language used to express them should.

Principle 3 — Avoid imposing Western frameworks

Identity, gender, family structure, disability, and leadership norms vary across cultures.

“Don’t impose Western frameworks.”

Instead of assuming universal understanding of terms like “LGBTQ+”, “intersectionality”, “youth empowerment”, or “women of color”, check the meaning and resonance in local contexts.

Principle 4 — Protect people in restrictive political environments

Statements that feel neutral in one region may be dangerous in another. In these contexts, a **“Checkpoint Reflection”** could be used.

If a story cannot be told without risking the physical safety or legal standing of a partner, even with asset framing or anonymization, we should pause and consider whether we should use the story. Trust is built by prioritizing partner safety over our communication goals.

Principle 5 — Focus on shared humanity and universal strengths

Asset framing allows universal values (care, resilience, leadership, creativity, purpose, solidarity) to shine, even where identity language must be limited.

C. Regional Examples & How Asset Framing Adapts

Below are illustrative examples of how language shifts across regions while core principles remain intact.

West Africa (e.g., Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria)

Context Considerations:

- LGBTQ+ identity discussions may be restricted by law.
- Community roles such as “aunties” and “uncles” often hold social significance.
- Youth leadership may be culturally linked to collective action, not individual recognition.

Example

Instead of:

“We work with LGBTQ+ youth activists in Liberia.”

Use:

“We support young people who are creating spaces of acceptance and safety in their communities.”

This communicates agency and purpose without exposing risk.

South Asia (e.g., India, Nepal, Bangladesh)

Context Considerations:

- Gender roles and caste dynamics influence identity.
- Direct confrontation in language may be seen as disrespectful.
- Disability terminology varies widely.

Example

Instead of:

“Challenging patriarchal norms.”

Use:

“Young women are working with their communities to create more equitable opportunities.”

This reframes systemic change in a relational, community-centered way.

Latin America (e.g., Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia)

Context Considerations:

- Strong movements for Indigenous rights.
- Terms like “Afro-descendant” have cultural significance.
- “Youth empowerment” may translate as political activism.

Example

Instead of:

“Marginalized communities need support.”

Use:

“Indigenous youth in Guatemala are leading cultural and educational initiatives that strengthen their communities.”

This recognizes heritage, agency, and leadership.

Europe & Eurasia (e.g., Ukraine, Serbia, Moldova)

Context Considerations:

- Conflict contexts require careful anonymity.
- “Refugee” vs “displaced person” has legal implications.
- Trauma-informed language is essential.

Example

Instead of:

“Children affected by war.”

Use:

“Young people in eastern Ukraine are rebuilding routines, friendships, and learning environments amidst ongoing instability.”

This centers resilience and daily life, not trauma imagery.

West Asia & North Africa (e.g., Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt)

Context Considerations:

- Religion plays a major role in social norms.
- Identity categories may be sensitive.
- Community-led initiatives often operate within faith-based frameworks.

Example (Faith-informed)

Instead of:

“Youth activists challenging discrimination.”

Use:

“Young leaders in Jordan are working with families, faith leaders, and communities to promote dignity and belonging.”

This honors local networks and cultural influences.

D. Cross-Country Initiatives

To avoid over-generalization while acknowledging cross-country initiatives, **name the collective accurately and then specify the diversity within it**, for example:

“This initiative connects youth leaders across Kenya, Ghana, and Senegal”

Recognizing the distinct cultural, political, and social contexts shaping their work rather than treating ‘African youth’ as a single experience.

E. Dos and Don’ts for Global & Multicultural Communication

✓ Dos

- **Do consult partners** about wording, identity terms, and safety.
- **Do use strengths-based language** that reflects local cultural values.
- **Do contextualize systems** (e.g., “barriers created by displacement”).
- **Do adapt tone** (direct vs. indirect) according to cultural norms.
- **Do respect local terminology** around gender, ethnicity, and community roles.
- **Do prioritize safety**, even if it means omitting identity details.
- **Do check translation accuracy**, especially for nuanced terms.
- **Do reflect community aesthetics**, rituals, and cultural expressions when safe.

✗ Don’ts

- **Don’t use Western-centric identity terms** without checking appropriateness.
- **Don’t assume direct translations exist** (e.g., “empowerment”, “queer”, “youth worker”).
- **Don’t expose risks** by naming identities in hostile environments.

- **Don’t generalize entire regions** (“African youth”, “Asian communities”).
- **Don’t erase cultural nuance** in the name of simplification.
- **Don’t romanticize resilience** or adversity.
- **Don’t prioritize donor expectations over community safety.**

F. Bringing It All Together: How GFC Applies These Principles

Global Principle:

Dignity-first communication that centers agency, community leadership, and safety.

Local Adaptation:

The way we express that dignity shifts depending on:

- cultural norms
- political environments
- language translation
- partner guidance
- safeguarding concerns
- expectations of donors and audiences

“This guide offers principles, not scripts. Adapt examples to local contexts.”

This empowers GFC colleagues to communicate responsibly while preserving the integrity of asset framing.

Asset framing is universal. Language is not.

By grounding your communication in dignity, partnership, agency, and safety, you can adapt tone and terminology confidently across every region where GFC works without losing what makes the GFC voice distinct and principled.

4. Frequently Asked Questions

This section addresses the real dilemmas GFC colleagues face when translating asset framing principles into practice. The answers are designed to be honest, grounding, and action-oriented, acknowledging that there is rarely a perfect solution, but there is almost always a thoughtful one.

A. How can we balance showing both agency and need without contradiction?

This is one of the most common concerns, and an important one. Asset framing does not ignore hardship, barriers, or structural injustice. Instead, it:

- Starts with a person’s identity, strengths, and aspirations
- Names the systemic barriers that limit access to opportunity
- Highlights the response, i.e., how people, partners, and GFC are acting to create change

This sequencing ensures the narrative stays rooted in dignity, not deficit.

Practical application:

- Avoid presenting people as powerless.
- Show how needs arise from systems, not personal failings.
- Demonstrate how communities are already acting and how GFC’s support strengthens that.

This approach maintains honesty while protecting dignity.

B. What should we do when donor requirements use language that conflicts with asset framing principles?

This tension is real and frequent. Donor forms, procurement frameworks, and grant portals sometimes require deficit-oriented language (“vulnerable groups,” “marginalized beneficiaries”).

As identified during the co-creation process of this guide, GFC staff often feel uncomfortable mirroring those terms even when strategically necessary.

Our approach:

- **Use the donor-required language only where unavoidable** (e.g., mandatory fields).
- **Add clarifying context:** “We use the term ‘vulnerable’ here because it aligns with donor categorization, though our work recognizes the strengths and aspirations of the young people we support.”
- **Frame narrative sections using asset-based language**, returning agency and dignity to the center.
- **Where possible, educate donors over time**, modelling alternative language choices or sharing learning resources.

This balances integrity with strategic realities.

C. How should we handle partner language that doesn't fully align with GFC's asset-framing approach?

GFC does not ask partners to change how they describe themselves, their communities, or their work. Partners retain full agency over their language, and their preferred wording should always be respected.

At the same time, GFC is responsible for how we describe partners and their impact in our own communications, particularly for external audiences such as donors, supporters, and the public. For this reason, GFC may use asset-framed editorial language when telling partner stories, even if this differs slightly from a partner's own phrasing.

In practice, this means:

- Retaining and attributing partner language where it is important to reflect their voice directly
- Layering in asset-framed language that reflects GFC's narrative style and values
- Ensuring any adaptation feels additive, not corrective

Example

"YOH describes its work as 'supporting marginalized and at-risk children and young people.'

Through this work, YOH strengthens young people's leadership, through fun learning experiences, and their ability to navigate systems that too often exclude them."

This approach allows GFC to model strength-based storytelling without implying that a partner's language is wrong or outdated. It is not about correcting partners; it is about translating shared intent for different audiences.

If you are unsure whether to retain, attribute, or layer language:

- Ask whether the partner's wording needs to be quoted verbatim
- Consider how an external audience might interpret the language

- Aim to foreground young people's strengths, agency, and leadership wherever possible

When in doubt, prioritize respect, transparency, and consent and seek a second opinion rather than making changes in isolation.

D. How much can we share about children and young people while maintaining safeguarding protocols?

Safeguarding must always take precedence over storytelling impact.

Key principles:

- Default to minimum disclosure, unless there is a clear and justifiable benefit.
- Avoid sharing identifiable details about children's backgrounds, trauma, or specific circumstances.
- Focus on actions, achievements, and aspirations, not personal hardships.
- Where anonymity is required, you can still foreground agency (e.g., "A young leader in Guatemala organized...").
- Always check with partners for cultural norms and risk perceptions.

Compelling storytelling is possible, and often stronger, when safety and dignity lead.

E. How do we talk about GFC’s role when we work through partner organizations?

Many colleagues raised this challenge: how to communicate GFC’s value without centering ourselves.

Key principles:

1. Position GFC as a connector, facilitator, amplifier, and investor, not the hero.

2. Use language like:

“GFC’s funding enables community-led organizations to deepen their impact...”

“We partner with organizations who are experts in their context...”

3. Acknowledge where our role is one step removed: “Through our partners, we support young people to...”

4. Partners may sometimes use “savior” language (e.g., “GFC saved us”). While we honor their gratitude, we must avoid amplifying a “hero funder” narrative.

Do not:

Simply quote, “GFC saved our organization.”

Do:

Contextualize the quote to focus on the resource rather than the donor. Example: “Partner X describes the lifeline provided by flexible funding during the crisis...”

This approach is honest, transparent, and aligned with localization commitments.

F. How do we authentically center young people’s voices when we work through partner organizations?

A very common concern, especially since GFC intentionally does not work directly with children and youth.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with partners to collect stories, quotes, and examples, ensuring consent processes are strong.
- Acknowledge the mediation: “This story was shared with us by our partners in...”
- Where possible, include audio, video, or direct quotes, even brief ones.
- Avoid over-polishing; authenticity is more important than narrative perfection.
- Trust partners’ knowledge on what is safe and respectful in their context.

Young people’s voices can be centered through proximity, partnership, and careful stewardship.

G. Asset framing feels intimidating or academic. How can we make it more natural?

This is normal, many staff shared that the concept feels “theoretical” at first.

What helps:

Focus on simple shifts, not perfection:

- Start with strengths
 - Name systems, not individuals
 - Show action, not passivity
- Use the Quick Reference sheets and glossary for quick support.
- Speak how you would speak to young people, not about them.
- Practice in low-stakes environments (e.g., internal emails, Slack messages).
- Ask colleagues to sense-check wording.

Over time, asset framing becomes muscle memory.

H. What should we do when we make mistakes or fall back into old communication patterns?

Mistakes are inevitable. What matters is the response.

Recommended approach:

- Acknowledge the issue without defensiveness.
- Assess impact, especially if the misstep affects a partner, young person, or community.
- Correct the language and update future materials.
- Share the learning with the team, supporting collective improvement.
- Be kind to yourself and colleagues. This is an ongoing practice, not a pass/fail test.

Creating a culture of learning builds trust internally and externally.

I. How can we bring donors along on this journey and influence expectations?

Donors are an essential audience and often open to evolution when engaged respectfully.

Strategies include:

- Model asset framing in all non-mandatory sections of donor communications.
- Share why GFC narrates stories the way it does, connecting it to safeguarding, dignity, and impact.
- Provide partners' or young people's language as evidence for preferred framing.
- Highlight sector shifts, localization, decolonizing philanthropy, ethical storytelling, to show alignment with industry trends.
- Use donor briefings as opportunities to introduce alternative language in gentle, practical ways.
- Celebrate donors who adopt or appreciate asset-framed approaches.

This ensures donors feel part of a shared purpose rather than "corrected."

J. What about situations where communities use deficit language themselves?

We understand that communities sometimes mirror narratives they have been socialized, often by NGOs or government bodies.

Our role is to:

- Avoid "correcting" people's lived experience.
- Reflect back their experiences accurately but respectfully, using language that affirms dignity.
- Model asset-based alternatives gently and consistently.
- Ensure people retain full agency in how their stories are told.

We honor their voice while avoiding amplification of harmful stereotypes.

5. Conclusion: Living Asset Framing

Asset framing at GFC is an ongoing organizational practice, not a one-time policy.

Many colleagues initially find asset framing “intimidating” or “too academic.” This is normal. Like any skill, it feels awkward at first. You will overthink word choices and second-guess your drafts.

But it gets easier. With practice, these principles become intuitive: rewriting a caption to highlight agency, reframing an email to emphasize partnership, telling stories with dignity rather than sympathy. Small shifts add up to cultural change.

A. Building Organizational Muscle

To make asset framing a lasting part of GFC’s culture, we must build it into regular routines and reflective spaces. This work grows stronger through:

- **Regular team discussions:** brief, informal conversations about wording choices, tensions, and new examples.
- **Shared review of communications:** looking at captions, reports, and stories together, asking: “Does this center dignity?”
- **Celebrating strong examples:** highlighting posts, proposals, or partner stories that exemplify asset framing.
- **Learning from missteps without shame:** recognizing that mistakes are inevitable, and that naming them is part of organizational maturity.

Asset framing is a practice of alignment: of language, values, and intention.

By treating each communication as an opportunity, not a test, we gradually embed these principles across the organization.

B. Feedback Loops With Partners and Communities

“How do partners and communities respond to our communications?”

Asset framing only succeeds when people represented in our communications feel respected and accurately portrayed. To make this real, GFC can build intentional feedback mechanisms, such as:

- **Partner review of stories before publication.**
- **Advisory relationships with youth-led groups** who comment on language and tone.
- **Informal check-ins:** “Does this feel true to your experience? Would you be proud to share this?”
- **Safeguarding-informed reflections:** ensuring individuals are never exposed to risk through how we communicate.

These feedback loops ensure communications are not only externally ethical but internally accountable.

C. Learning, Experimentation & Evolution

This guide explicitly gives permission for trying new approaches and making adjustments, asking questions and acknowledging uncertainty, moving at different speeds across the organization, and evolving language as contexts shift. Asset framing is meant to unlock more meaningful, accurate, and ethical communication, but not to restrict creativity.

D. Bringing Donors and Stakeholders Along the Journey

“Shifting donor expectations takes time.”

Changing how the sector communicates is slow work. Donors and external audiences may initially expect deficit narratives or simplified stories of need. But GFC’s role is to lead with integrity and gradually influence expectations by:

- Modelling asset framing in all public-facing copy.
- Explaining our approach when terms like “vulnerable” must be used.
- Sharing learning resources, examples, and stories that illustrate why asset framing matters.
- Being transparent about power dynamics and community leadership.
- Creating opportunities for donors to hear directly from partners and youth.

Over time, these small acts of modelling contribute to broader shifts in philanthropy and development.

E. Regular Review and Updating of the Guide

This guide should be revisited annually by GFC’s communications and development teams. Updates should be collected on a shared space throughout the year, which incorporate new examples from partners, evolved language based on cultural and political changes, feedback from young people, and lessons from implementation.

F. Final Thought: Asset Framing as A Promise to Our Partners and Communities

This guide ends where asset framing begins with people.

The language we choose is more than a communications decision. It is a moral one and about leadership. It determines whether we reinforce old power dynamics or help build new ones.

This guide is not a rulebook to be policed. It is a promise we make to the communities and partners we work with. A promise that we will not define them by what they lack, but by what they dream. A promise that we will tell the whole truth, including the systemic injustice they face, without losing sight of their brilliance.

By applying asset framing, we do more than just improve our writing. We model the world we want to see.

And like all meaningful leadership, this is a living practice. We will make mistakes. We will learn and grow over time, through practice, curiosity, humility, and care.

This guide is a living resource.

Asset framing is a living practice.

And GFC is a living, learning organization, committed to doing this work with care and integrity.

6. References and Further Resources

If you would like to deepen your understanding of asset framing and inclusive communication, we recommend the following curated resources. These authors offer the frameworks needed to challenge our own biases and tell stories that truly honor the brilliance of the young people we serve.

Foundational Articles

McGowan, J. C. (2023). *Telling a Better Nonprofit Story*. IDR. Access [here](#)

Shorter, T. (2019). *The Power of Perception: The Beginner's Guide to Asset Framing*. Change Agent. Access [here](#)

Benjamin, D. (2022). *Asset Framing for Nonprofits: Writing Toward Hope*. Friday. Access [here](#)

Toolkits and Practical Guides

Oxfam (2023). *Inclusive Language Guide*. Access [here](#)

Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (2018). *His Story: Shifting Narratives for Boys and Men of Color*. Perception Institute. Access [here](#)

Sweetland, J. and Pineau M.G (2025). *Talking About Young People in a Time of Manufactured Controversy*. Frameworks Institute. Access [here](#)

Frameworks Institute (2024). *Guiding Narrative Change: Considerations for the Philanthropic Field*. Access [here](#)

Ethical Storytelling. Resources. Access [here](#)

Multimedia and Podcasts

Shorter, T. *A Cognitive Skill to Magnify Humanity*. On Being Podcast. Listen [here](#)

Candid (2022). *Asset Framing: What Is It and Why Is It Important?* Watch [video](#)

7. Appendix A:

Decision-Making and Implementation Toolkit

This toolkit provides practical tools to help GFC colleagues apply asset framing and inclusive language principles to all types of communications, from impact reports and donor letters to newsletters and social media content. It includes two practical checklists and a decision-making framework to support consistent, dignified, and justice-based storytelling.

Tool 1: Checklist for Reviewing Existing Content

Purpose: To help teams evaluate whether existing materials reflect GFC's values of dignity, justice, and power-sharing.

Review Area	Key Questions	What Good Looks Like
Purpose & Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the piece make clear why this work matters? Does it lead with possibility rather than crisis? Does it show systemic causes before individual impact? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opens with a clear why linked to justice, equity, or rights. Frames challenges as barriers, not personal failings. Demonstrates progress and agency, not rescue.
Representation & Story Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are individuals or communities portrayed with dignity and complexity? Would they feel happy owning their story? Is their voice visible or quoted directly? Have we acknowledged our storyteller lens and biases? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are active subjects, not passive recipients. Quotes or photos reflect pride, context, and purpose. Biases and assumptions are interrogated before publication.
Balance of Evidence & Narrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are individual stories supported by systems-level data? Is there a balance between emotional resonance and factual integrity? Are challenges shown alongside resilience and outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combines GFC's Global Impact Study findings with personal stories. Success is attributed to communities, not GFC. Acknowledges both obstacles and progress.

Language & Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the language affirm dignity and power? • Have we avoided labels like 'vulnerable' or 'marginalized' without context? • Are we describing systems before people? • Is tone consistent with GFC's partnership ethos? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses people-first, agency-focused language. Frames need as opportunity for partnership. Tone is respectful, collaborative, and hopeful.
Visuals & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do images show action, collaboration, or learning? Have we ensured consent and safeguarding? Do captions convey agency rather than circumstance? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs show people doing, not receiving. • Consent is documented. • Captions highlight context and contribution.
Cultural & Contextual Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the piece account for local culture, language, and safety? • Have partners reviewed regional references? • Does it avoid Western-centric assumptions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows cultural humility and contextual adaptation. • Avoids identity disclosure that may cause harm. • Includes partner input where relevant.
Internal Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were program and communications teams consulted? • Were partners offered the opportunity to review content before publication? • Were decisions documented transparently? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-team review process is followed. Partner feedback is reflected. • Drafts show alignment with internal standards.

Tool 2: Checklist for Creating New Content

Purpose: To guide staff through the creation of new communications that are both practical and principled.

Stage	Guiding Prompts	Tips for Practice
Define the Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the goal (inform, influence, inspire, report)? • Who is the primary audience and what do they value? • How does this align with GFC’s justice-based mission? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead with why. Establish a clear purpose before writing. Start every brief with a one-sentence justice statement.
Gather Ethical Evidence & Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are stories co-created with partners? • Have we obtained informed consent? • Are we balancing systems evidence and lived experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair data with real-world examples. • Use the GFC Global Impact Study to evidence scale. • Use community voices to illustrate nuance.
Draft with Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we centering people, not GFC? • Have we shown both agency and support needs? • Are we leading with goals before barriers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence: Goal → Context → Challenge → Action → Result. • Use verbs of agency (lead, create, organize).
Review for Language & Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does every sentence convey dignity? • Have we contextualized words like ‘at risk’ or ‘marginalized’? • Would we be comfortable reading this in front of the person featured? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a “red flag” review: highlight any terms that could disempower. Replace with specific, system-linked descriptions.
Select Images Thoughtfully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does each image represent empowerment or collaboration? • Have you confirmed consent and safeguarding compliance? • Does the visual reflect cultural authenticity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose context and action shots. • Avoid victim imagery or passive poses. • Ensure captions include agency.
Partner & Program Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we shared drafts with regional or program colleagues? • Did they validate representation accuracy? • Were differing opinions reconciled transparently? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule partner review before publication. • Document changes made following feedback. • Build trust through transparency.
Final Reflection Before Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this content uphold all five core principles? • Have we explained any necessary donor-language compromises? • Does this strengthen community voice and shared understanding? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a one-line ‘why this story matters’ statement at the end of each piece. • Include a note to update or revisit after partner feedback.

Tool 3: The GFC 5-Stage Asset-Framing Framework (5Ps)

Purpose: To integrate all the principles, checklists, and values into a single model for decision-making.

Stage	Principle in Action	Key Question	Example Application
Purpose	Lead with justice and impact, not charity	Why are we telling this story and what change will it drive?	Donor letter begins: “Our partners are driving change across...” not “We are helping communities in...”
People	Center people, not problems	Who is centered — GFC or the community?	Use “young leaders in Uganda are creating spaces for...” rather than “GFC supports vulnerable children to...”
Power	Recognize community agency	How are communities already leading change?	Highlight: “Through their initiative...” instead of “Thanks to GFC...”
Process	Balance systems and stories	Have we shown both structural change and lived experience?	“Across 40 countries, GFC’s partners are transforming education access — here’s how it looks in Kolhapur.”
Practice	Ensure dignity through complexity	Have we respected cultural, contextual, and safeguarding considerations?	“We work with partners to ensure stories are told safely and contextually, protecting identity where necessary.”

Tool 4: The Context Grid

Purpose: A decision matrix for aligning language, tone, and asset framing to your audience.

A. Who Are You Talking ABOUT?

Choose the primary group being referred to in the communication.

Who You're Talking About	Key Considerations	Initial Asset-Framing Guidance
Young people directly	Safeguarding, anonymity, age-appropriateness	Focus on strengths, aspirations, agency, and achievements. Avoid labels
Partner organizations	Local context, political risk, recognition	Honor expertise, leadership, and innovation. Credit partners clearly
Communities	Diversity within groups, not monolithic	Avoid generalizations (e.g., "African youth"). Name strengths and systems
GFC as an organization	Transparency, accuracy, humility	Focus on role as connector, amplifier, resource-provider, not savior
Systemic barriers (policies, institutions, structures)	Clarity vs political sensitivity	Name systems without positioning individuals as deficient

B. Who Are You Talking To?

Choose the audience receiving the message.

Who Are You Talking To?	Tone & Language	What They Need Most	What to Avoid
Young people	Conversational, affirming, respectful	Clarity, relevance, recognition of agency	Jargon, deficit framing
Southern partners	Collaborative, consultative, context-aware	Accuracy about local realities; shared leadership	Western-centric terms; paternalism
Northern donors	Transparent, compelling, impact-oriented	Clear outcomes, why GFC is a valuable partner	Overclaiming; crisis-extractive stories
General public	Simple, human-centered	Clear stories, relatable values	Complex policy language
Sector specialists	Nuanced, precise	Evidence, systems framing, insights	Oversimplification
Internal teams	Honest, reflective	Alignment, clarity	Overly formal or donor-sounding language

8. Appendix B: Strength-Based Language and Glossary

Using Language that Reflects Dignity, Strength, and Potential

At GFC, words matter. Every phrase we choose reflects how we see the children, young people, and partners we work alongside. Language shapes perception, of others and of ourselves, and we have a responsibility to ensure that the words we use convey respect, strength, and shared humanity.

This section is designed as a practical reference tool for colleagues. It supports quick, thoughtful language decisions in reports, campaigns, donor communications, and conversations with partners. It includes:

1. Language Alternatives Quick Reference Sheet
2. Glossary of Key Terms
3. Regional and Cultural Variations
4. Asset Framing Vocabulary

8.1. Language Alternatives Quick Reference Sheet

Deficit Word	Alternatives	Why it Matters
Vulnerable	Facing systemic barriers; living in challenging circumstances; disproportionately affected by...; Experiencing instability due to conflict/climate/economic pressures	“Vulnerable” can be overused and generalizing. Specify context.
Empower / Empowering	Partner with; strengthen capacity; create enabling conditions; support agency, Expand opportunities	“Empower” can imply we give power. Instead, focus on partnership and self-determination.
Marginalized	Underrepresented; excluded by systems; historically overlooked communities, historically excluded; Systemically disadvantaged; Communities pushed to the edges by policy/structures	Avoid defining people by marginalization; name systems, not deficits.
At-risk youth	Young people navigating risk; young people facing limited access to opportunities; Facing threats of...	Clarifies what the risk is, avoids labelling the person as the risk.

Grassroots organizations	Community-led organizations; locally driven partners; Movement-based organizations	“Grassroots” may feel diminishing in some contexts; emphasize leadership and professionalism.
Beneficiaries	Partners; participants; young leaders; collaborators; community partners	Reflects agency, not passive receipt of aid.
Developing countries	Global Majority countries; partner countries; lower-income regions	Recognizes global context and avoids hierarchical framing.
Disadvantaged communities	Communities facing barriers to opportunity; communities driving change; facing inequitable access;	Names inequity without defining people by hardship.
Giving voice to	Amplifying voices; creating space for; listening to	Everyone already has a voice. Focus on access and amplification.
Helping	Partnering with; supporting; working alongside; co-create solutions; resource	Reinforces solidarity, not charity.
Hard-to-reach	Systemically excluded; Overlooked by institutions; Communities underserved by existing systems	Avoid blaming communities for inaccessibility.
Frontline communities	Communities experiencing the greatest impacts of...; Communities most affected by...	Reduces militarized language.
Underserved	Overlooked; Underinvested in; Excluded by current systems	More accurate and respectful.
Victims	Survivors; People with lived experience; Individuals affected by...	Center dignity and agency.

8.2. Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Agency	The ability to make choices that matter.
Capacity Strengthening	Improving resources, skills, or structures so communities can achieve their goals.
Equity	Fairness that recognizes different needs, not treating everyone the same.
Justice	Addressing the root causes of inequity, not only the symptoms.
Stigma	Negative stereotypes that harm or isolate groups.
Wellbeing	Emotional, physical, and social health — universal and culturally interpretable.
Inclusive Language	Language that avoids bias, stereotypes, and assumptions, ensuring everyone feels respected, seen, and valued.
Strength-Based Language	Words that reflect agency, capacity, and growth rather than need, lack, or weakness.
Systemic Barriers	Institutional or structural inequalities that limit access to opportunities for certain groups.
Locally Led	Initiatives designed, driven, and owned by community actors, not externally imposed.
Safer Communications	Practices that protect individuals’ privacy, dignity, and wellbeing when sharing stories or images.
Ethical Storytelling	The practice of telling stories with consent, accuracy, and accountability to those represented.

8.3. Regional & Cultural Variations

GFC works across multiple cultural, linguistic, and political contexts. The meaning and acceptability of words shift regionally.

Below is a list of terms requiring regional sensitivity.

Word / Phrase	Why It Varies
Empowerment	May not exist as a direct translation in many languages; can imply an external actor gives power.
Grassroots	May feel celebratory in some countries; in others, perceived as belittling the professionalism of local organizations.
Youth vs. Young People	“Youth” carries political meaning in some African countries (youth movements), and age boundaries differ globally.
Community	Can refer to geographical proximity in some places; in others, it implies identity or belonging rather than location.
Vulnerable	Strong negative connotations in some regions; may be seen as disrespectful unless contextualized (e.g., “vulnerable to displacement”).
Minority / Minoritized	“Minority” is numerical; “minoritized” acknowledges systems of marginalization. However, the latter is less understood globally.
Global South / Global North	Has political and academic legitimacy but may not resonate with all partners; “Global Majority” increasingly preferred.
Indigenous	Legally recognized groups in some countries; not interchangeable with “local communities.”
Frontline	May evoke conflict or militarization; better alternatives: communities most affected by....
Survivor	Positive framing in many countries, but some partners prefer people with lived experience.
Champion / Role Model	Universally positive but can feel tokenistic if used without context.
Safe Space	May not translate conceptually; better described as “supportive environments” or “non-judgmental spaces.”

8.4. Asset-Framed Vocabulary

Personal Qualities

Resourceful, ambitious, creative, hopeful, visionary, confident, grounded, reflective, courageous, adaptable, empathetic, determined, self-directed, insightful, imaginative, collaborative, supportive, strategic, compassionate, articulate, forward-thinking, principled, community-minded, generous, respectful.

Community Language

Thriving, vibrant, connected, locally-driven, equitable, intergenerational, inclusive, dynamic, organized, caring, culturally rich, self-sustaining, innovative, tightly-knit, future-focused, co-operative, empowered (with caution).

Action & Contribution

Building, learning, guiding, uplifting, catalyzing, co-designing, advocating, mobilizing, creating pathways, strengthening systems, facilitating, bridging, amplifying, shaping policy, generating solutions.

Identity & Belonging

Leaders, youth leaders, change agents, bridge-builders, youth advocates, community stewards, innovators, visionaries, mentors, protectors, cultural custodians, peer leaders, connectors, supporters, collaborators.



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