“We the People” — Reimagining the Future of Development Cooperation, Building on Lived Realities of Kenyan Civil Society Organisations.

Contributors: Abdi Adan Tawane, Akello Isabbella Opido, Alba Anyu Nakuwa, Alex Wesonga, Alseba Wagah, Andrew Kiptum, Arnold Morwani Nyamweya, Boniface Mungoya Mundu, Boniface Mutinda, Brenda Nyambura, Caleb Baraka, Caroline Karobia, Caroline Ojuondo, Christine Atieno Osongo, Clemency Dorah Wawuda, Cosmas Mutua, Craig Magati, Cynthia Omondi, Daniel Kimolel, David Ezekia Sebit, David Ngure, David Wanjui, Davis Mutungi, Edwin Mwema, Elizabeth Akinyi, Emirto Rienhart, Emmanuel Barare, Emmanuel Masheti, Ephy Mwaura, Eric Sekitoleko Balamaga, Eunice Mwaura, Evalyne Mutuku, Evans Ijakaa, Faith Meneto, Felix Kithinji Murithi, Francis Ngugi, Gamba Kizito, Gordon Taro, Grace Muraya, Hassan Koki Salim, Herbert Wamalwa, Immaculate Obara, Imunde, Irene Ngolo, Isaac Mong’are, James Mema, Jamin Avugwi, John Kuria, John Wambugu, Josephine Mbiyu, Josh Maiyo, Joy Omari, Katharina Otieno, Kennedy Odera, Kevin Mulega, Kingwa Kamencu, Kirubel Alemu, Kuku Alesam Majub, Lilian Opiyo, Losh, Lynne Fancy Brenda, Magala Brian, Malema Patience, Marc, Marko Tomicic, Maureen Sharon Awino, Mercy Juma, Michael Timonah, Miriam Kariuki, Moses Isooba, Nelson Shamparo, Norah Nakyegera, Okari Magati, Oscar Luchivya, Patrick Gichuki, Paul Amrumra, Paul Kamau, Phidiliah Rose, Philip Ongeri, Phylis Akinyi, Pius Okore, Raphael Indimuli, Richard Waindi, Rispah Kariuki, Roi Roisa, Roselyne Omondi, Rama Bonoya, Saida Nur, Sara Kinsbergen, Seth Mwangi, Tessy Lulia Salano, Theophilus Makau Kioko, Tom Were, Victoria Kinyua, Wafula Tunduli, Walter Musoda, Wanjiru Kinyua, Wycliff Osango

November, 2025

1. Introduction[1]

Global budget cuts and shifting priorities in development cooperation are disrupting programmes, affecting communities, and putting sustained pressure on organisations across the sector. These shifts are not only financial; they are reshaping the very architecture of how development is organised and practiced.

Against this backdrop, the dialogue "Beyond the Development Cooperation Budget Cuts: From Lived Experience to Shared Roadmaps" brought together community members, practitioners, policymakers, scholars, students, and community actors from NGOs, CBOs, and government institutions, and social enterprises/private sector. Convened in Nairobi, Kenya, on October 24, 2025. It provided a space to collectively sketch a picture of the impact on communities, organisations, and partnerships, building on frontline realities of key actors and stakeholders, and to co-create first ideas for future avenues.

The event was organised by the University of Nairobi (UoN) - Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Vice Versa Global, and Radboud University (the Netherlands). Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) and Impact Kenya provided support.

This paper captures the essence of the outcomes of the dialogues, serving as a means to inform and inspire reflections among development actors — including donors, practitioners, and policymakers alike. It aims to share grounded insights from lived experiences, helping to deepen understanding of the real impacts of current shifts in development cooperation. The reflections are also intended to support those rethinking their engagement, offering guidance on where collaboration is most needed, which areas are most vulnerable, and what to consider when operating in a rapidly changing development landscape.

While others are rightly examining in detail the impact of recent budget cuts on people's lives — including sectoral analyses such as in global health, and tracking specific figures on funding reductions, programme closures, or job losses — this paper does not attempt to quantify these effects (see, for example, ImpactCounter; OECD, 2025; IDDRI, 2025). Instead, our focus is twofold: first, to amplify how such changes are experienced and interpreted by those working within and alongside affected communities; and second, to build on these lived realities to understand how the current shifts are collectively reshaping the broader ecosystem of development cooperation — its relationships, legitimacy, and future pathways.

2. Methods

Two complementary data sources form the basis of this paper:

1. Registration questionnaire
2. Citizen dialogue

Participants were invited to the event through social media announcements and targeted email outreach via the organising

[1]**Citation note:** This report should be cited as: Reimagining Development Cooperation Collective–Nairobi. (2025). *"We the People": Reimagining the future of development cooperation, building on lived realities of Kenyan civil society organisations*. Nairobi.

committee's networks. In total, 98 people completed the survey, while 70 attended the dialogue, including 27 new participants who had not registered beforehand. Altogether, 125 individuals contributed to shaping the findings.

The questionnaire collected basic sociodemographic information (age, gender), as well as the name and location of the organisation represented. It also included two open-ended questions:

1. How has your work been affected by recent budget cuts or shifts in development cooperation priorities?
2. In your view, what's the most urgent challenge facing development cooperation today?

Citizen Dialogue

The dialogue itself was structured around three central questions:

1. What is the impact on the communities you work and/or live?
2. What is the impact on your organisation?
3. What is the impact on the partnerships your organisation is involved in?

Participants discussed these topics in small groups of about seven, guided by table hosts, during a 50-minute dialogue session. This was followed by a plenary wrap-up. Outputs were captured digitally in Wooclap, an online platform used to gather live input from participants during the dialogue, and manually on flipcharts. Both sources were subsequently compiled and thematically analysed, combining the dialogue data with the open-text responses from the registration questionnaire.

The group was diverse in demographics, geography, and professional affiliations (See Table 1). 57% identified as male, 41% as female, and 2% did not specify gender. The majority were between 25 and 44 years old**.** Professionally, participants came primarily from NGOs (33.7%), followed by community-based organisations - CBOs (14.6%), students/independents (11.2%), and academia and research institutions (9%). In terms of geographic distribution, most were based in Nairobi and neighbouring counties (around one-third), while others joined from across Kenya (around a quarter) and a few from Uganda.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

Category		**% of participants**
Gender	Male	57%
	Female	41%
	Unknown	2%
Age	Under 25	8.2%
	25–34	38.8%
	35–44	27.6%
	45–54	12.2%
	55+	3.1%
	Unknown	10.2%
Type of Organ/ Profession	NGO	33.7%
	CBO / Grassroots Network	14.6%
	Academia / Research	9.0%
	Student / Independent	11.2%
	Social Enterprise / Private Sector	7.9%
	Government	4.5%
	Other / Multiple	19.1%

This paper presents a synthesis of insights from participants' survey responses and dialogues. The individuals and organisations who contributed represent diverse contexts, sectors, and experiences. While every effort has been made to capture the range of perspectives expressed, not every statement reflects the views or realities of all participants. The findings and quotes included aim to illustrate key themes and patterns that emerged across the discussions, rather than provide a comprehensive account of each participant's experience.

3. Impacts on communities, organisations, and partnerships

3.1 Impact on communities

Across communities, the withdrawal of external funding has had profound social and economic repercussions. Livelihoods have been lost, access to essential services has declined, and inequalities have deepened. Many participants described a growing sense of abandonment as projects were halted mid-way, leaving communities without continuity of care or support.

Particularly vulnerable are refugees, internally displaced persons, persons living with disabilities, women, youth, and communities on the frontlines of climate change. These groups have experienced both direct and indirect effects: from the loss of humanitarian assistance, education opportunities, and health services to the breakdown of protection systems and increased exposure to gender-based & domestic violence and early marriage as social protection collapsed.

Several participants spoke of acute distress within communities, such as rising mental health challenges, suicide, and social tensions.

The cuts have disproportionately affected longer-term initiatives that depended on community engagement and capacity strengthening — programmes designed to build resilience rather than deliver short-term outputs were often the first to lose funding. As a result, support has shifted toward short-term, output-oriented interventions, leaving behind areas that require sustained local participation and investment.

Beyond the visible effects on daily life, the disruption has also shaken relationships of trust between citizens, civil society organisations, and the broader development system. Communities that once viewed local organisations as reliable partners now see them struggling to deliver, fuelling scepticism and disappointment. For many, this has translated into a declining sense of legitimacy and moral authority of the civil society sector itself.

This erosion of trust extends to governments and government systems, which are often seen as absent or unresponsive, widening the gap between institutions and the people they serve. The result is a more fragile civic fabric, where cooperation, accountability, and participation risks giving way to frustration and disengagement.

3.2 Impact on organisations

The impact on organisations has been significant and far-reaching. Participants described how budget cuts have disrupted operations, led to staff layoffs, and salary cuts. Some participants describe morale as down, and there is confusion about priorities. Many organisations reported difficulty mobilising resources, low fundraising outcomes, and a limited ability to achieve their long-term goals.

For some, this has meant reshaping strategies, scaling down operations, or suspending activities altogether. The term institutional brittleness surfaced repeatedly — signalling limited flexibility and resilience in the face of rapid change. Participants explained how under current funding constraints, many organisations are forced into short-term planning horizons, able to look only a few months — and rarely more than a year — into the future.

Alongside these operational struggles, participants noted an erosion of legitimacy and reputational risk (see also above).

As projects stall, close, or scale down, organisations face frustration from communities who perceive them as unreliable, despite circumstances beyond their control. This breakdown of confidence undermines the social contract between civil society actors and the people they serve. The inability to deliver programmes has led to a visible loss of goodwill, raising difficult questions about accountability and the credibility of civic organisations more broadly. Internally, this instability translates into burnout, psychological strain, and confusion on priorities, with staff described as "*deeply affected*".

A key insight emerging from the dialogue was the uneven vulnerability within the civil society ecosystem. Smaller and emerging organisations — particularly grassroots, youth, and women-led groups — revealed a striking paradox. Many were not direct recipients of large-scale donor funding and thus escaped the immediate blow of the cuts. Yet, their insulation from direct aid has created new pressures. As communities around them lose services and as larger organisations and governments struggle to sustain operations, these smaller actors are being called upon to fill widening gaps — often without the resources to do so. Participants recounted how *"other organisations or even local authorities knock at our door",* aware that these smaller groups remain operational but overstretched.

"Grassroots organisations like ours are being asked to fill the gaps, but we have no resources left."

At the same time, some of those same grassroots actors — *"picking up the grains at the end of the funding chain"* — are indirectly hit by the contraction of the broader aid ecosystem. Funding that once trickled down through multiple layers of intermediaries now dries up before reaching them. Youth and women-led organisations, often at the forefront of social innovation, described their small, flexible initiatives as *"drying up first"*. Newer organisations still in the process of building systems and credibility reported feeling *"frozen mid-growth",* unable to meet donor compliance requirements or sustain visibility.

Together, these experiences reveal a structural fragility across the sector: both visibility and invisibility create vulnerability.

Established organisations face reputational loss and reduced legitimacy, while smaller ones face unsustainable expectations and resource scarcity. Dependence on external funding has been laid bare, forcing many to *"rethink who we depend on".*

3.3 Impact on Partnerships

The current funding environment is reshaping relationships across local, national, and international levels.

Participants described a landscape marked by fragmentation, uncertainty, and shifting power dynamics. Traditional partnerships with donors and international NGOs are weakening, while new actors — including foundations, governments, and private-sector entities, and local philanthropic initiatives, — are stepping in to fill emerging gaps. These shifts, however, bring both promise and pressure. Many participants noted that while the diversification of partners may enhance resilience, it also introduces increased competition, heavier administrative demands, and, in some cases, a loss of strategic coherence across the broader ecosystem of cooperation.

A recurring sentiment was that partnerships are in a period of recalibration — one defined by strained trust, blurred roles, and the renegotiation of legitimacy. The balance of influence between donors and local actors is being rewritten, yet not always in predictable ways. Many organisations reported a reduction in external partnerships, citing a "*loss of cooperation with donors"* and a "*decline in international collaboration"*. Simultaneously, relationships with government institutions have become more complex, with several accounts of "*political interference"* or *misalignment* that hinder coordination and accountability.

The erosion of trust — described as "*loss of goodwill"* and "*broken partnerships"* — was among the most consistent concerns raised. Some organisations now navigate a fragmented field where collaboration is weakened by competition for scarce resources and the absence of synergy among actors.

The effect is a thinning of relationships, where short-term survival increasingly outweighs long-term solidarity.

Participants also observed a transformation in the geography and character of donor engagement. Foundations in the Global North and the Gulf region are being approached with unprecedented frequency as other sources of aid contract. Some are described as *"coming down to visit and scout new potential partners",* signalling genuine interest in more direct engagement. Yet others are *"closing their doors to new ones",* unable to manage the surge in requests. For local organisations, these visits are often double-edged — a welcome opportunity for visibility, but also an additional burden for already stretched teams who must host and respond to these new demands.

The result is a paradoxical environment: while the number of potential partners may be increasing, the quality and sustainability of these relationships remain in question. Growing among organisations for limited foundation and local funding risks fostering an atmosphere of "*rivalry rather than collaboration"*. Several participants warned that this fragmentation risks undermining collective efforts toward shared goals, eroding the spirit of cooperation that once defined development partnerships.

Beneath these shifts lies another subtler but critical risk: the re-concentration of influence among donors. As competition for limited funds intensifies, many organisations find themselves compelled to align more closely with donor preferences — often at the expense of local priorities or longer-term agendas – mission drift.

Participants warned that decreased funding has made organisations *"more cautious and compliant"*, favouring short-term, output-oriented projects that are easier to justify but less transformative.

Donors themselves, under pressure to be accountable and visible, tend to prioritise measurable results and high-profile interventions. The result is a growing mismatch between what is funded and what is needed, threatening to undo gains made toward shifting power and promoting locally led approaches.

"Reduced funding has led to the scaling down or postponement of several key programs, particularly those focused on long-term capacity building and community engagement, which are often the first to be deprioritised in tighter budget environments."

Overall, the picture that emerges is one of deep transition — a partnership landscape caught between the decline of traditional *aid* models and the uncertain rise of new forms of collaboration. Relationships are being rewritten under pressure, revealing both the fragility of old frameworks and the potential for more equitable and locally anchored approaches in the future.

Across all three domains — communities, organisations, and partnerships — participants drew attention to both the direct and immediate impacts of funding cuts and the indirect, longer-term consequences that are only beginning to unfold. Table 2 below presents a more detailed outline of examples shared of impacts on communities, organisations, and partnerships. The visible effects are those most easily documented: job losses, halted and/or scaled down projects, and the interruption of critical services such as healthcare delivery and the distribution of HIV/AIDS medicines. Yet beneath these surface disruptions lie less visible but equally significant shifts — in organisational legitimacy, community trust, and the balance of power between local and international actors.

Several respondents warned that the focus on the "here and now" risks creating blind spots. Short-term humanitarian or output-driven funding is being prioritised over long-term investments in community engagement, capacity strengthening, and systemic change. As a result, the very foundations of local resilience — including social cohesion, strong civil society, leadership development, and inter-organisational collaboration — are being eroded quietly and cumulatively.

This layered perspective underscores that the crisis is not only financial but structural: its full impact may be less immediate to the eye, but it is reshaping the development ecosystem in enduring ways.

4. Ways forward and emerging opportunities

Despite widespread disruption, participants described not only hardship but also a period of renewed creativity, collaboration, and self-determination. Across dialogues and survey responses, a picture emerged of actors rethinking relationships, diversifying resources, and reclaiming ownership of local development agendas.
The following themes capture these directions for adaptation and transformation.

4.1 Building resilience through localised and diversified collaboration

Across communities, organisations, and partnerships, the clearest response to the current disruption is a movement toward localised, networked, and diversified models of cooperation.

Participants emphasised local resource mobilisation as a first step in reducing dependency and reclaiming agency — *"We are finding ways to harness local resources*".

This included greater collaboration with county and local governments, the growth of social enterprises that sustain staff and operational costs, and stronger community self-help initiatives that keep basic services alive.

At the organisational level, actors are rethinking strategies and diversifying revenue sources, seeking private partnerships, building local donor bases, and exploring social enterprise or micro-investment models to sustain activities. Some noted that "we are learning to do more with less," while others spoke of technology helping to extend reach and reduce costs.

Despite — and partly in response to — growing competition (see above), others also expressed stronger intentions to collaborate. There was a clear call to work together more effectively — both horizontally and regionally. Participants pointed to the need for greater coordination and alignment among NGOs, avoiding duplication and fragmentation, and instead pooling capacities around shared goals. South–South and intra-African collaborations were described as spaces of hope, where solidarity and mutual learning can replace donor-dependency. As one participant put it, "*We must strengthen ties among ourselves before seeking outside support*."

Finally, local institutions and the private sector are increasingly part of this mix. Respondents cited examples of local banks, Rotary chapters, and private foundations stepping in to fill funding gaps — illustrating a growing recognition that sustainable development requires whole-of-society cooperation.

Together, these shifts reveal an emerging pattern of resilience through reconnection: a more grounded, diversified, and locally owned development ecosystem that is less vulnerable to external volatility.

4.2 Renegotiating power and knowledge in Development Cooperation

The second major theme concerns power, legitimacy, and the ownership of knowledge. Across responses, participants called for a profound rebalancing in international cooperation — from dependency to reciprocity, from externally defined models to co-created frameworks built on justice, equity, and mutual accountability.

Many described this as a transition from "charity to justice", urging a moral, political, and epistemic recalibration of relationships between the Global North and South.

Respondents called for fairer negotiations, mutual accountability, and a shared redefinition of what partnership means — not as a compliance-based arrangement but as a co-creation of knowledge and action led by local realities.

Several participants warned that the most urgent challenge is the disconnect between global agendas and local needs:

"While global agendas increasingly emphasize localization and inclusion, funding mechanisms remain rigid and top-down, often sidelining grassroots actors who hold the deepest contextual knowledge. Development cooperation must urgently realign toward trust-based, flexible, and sustained partnerships that center local expertise, intersectional realities, and the lived experiences of communities most affected by inequality and violence."

This disconnect, they observed, weakens community resilience and undermines long-term impact — especially in Indigenous, pastoralist, and grassroots contexts, where adaptive local knowledge has long sustained livelihoods without external aid.

"To move forward, development cooperation must transition from extractive and top-down approaches to equitable, co-created partnerships that value Indigenous knowledge as an essential foundation for long-term impact. Development must stop asking, 'Who will fill the funding gap?' and start asking, 'What do we already have?' because true resilience begins with recognizing the value of our own knowledge systems."

Participants stressed that local and Indigenous knowledge systems must no longer be treated as secondary or supplementary, but as the starting point for meaningful cooperation.
Reclaiming this knowledge sovereignty, alongside African leadership in research, policy, and practice, was seen as essential to restoring the legitimacy, accountability, and moral grounding of international development.

4.3 Redefining Development: From Charity to Justice

A third current running through the dialogues was the call to redefine development itself — moving from a charity-based paradigm to one rooted in justice, accountability, and shared responsibility. Participants argued that the crisis in funding is also a crisis of legitimacy, exposing not only financial fragility but also moral contradictions in the current system.

Several described this shift succinctly: *"Treat development as justice"* and *"link development with equity and fairness".*

This reframing sees cooperation not as benevolence but as part of a broader social contract between societies, where responsibility for inequality and climate vulnerability is collectively owned.

Within this vision, governance and integrity become central. Respondents pointed to corruption, lack of transparency, and policies favouring elites as key barriers to fair cooperation. Calls were made to reform tax systems, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and ensure that domestically generated resources are used for the public good rather than elite capture. Some participants highlight how current wave of budget cuts illustrate how reliance on donor funding for essential state functions creates structural vulnerability.

When USAID cut funding in January 2025, national access to key health-data systems — including platforms hosting demographic and health information — was disrupted because they were hosted on donor-managed servers, jeopardizing continuity of core public services when funding priorities shift.

5. Spotlighting the unseen: Risks and Invitations for renewal

Beyond the visible consequences of budget cuts — halted programmes, job losses, and service disruptions — participants drew attention to deeper and less visible transformations that may shape the sector for years to come. These include an erosion of trust in civil society organisations, a renewed concentration of power among donors, and a gradual thinning of the civic landscape. While these developments pose significant risks, they also create an opening for renewal: to rebuild legitimacy, safeguard local agency, and protect the diversity that sustains civil society ecosystems. Table 3 below presents a more detailed outline of examples shared of avenues for the future.

Erosion of legitimacy: Rebuilding trust as a social foundation

Across dialogues, participants voiced concern that the credibility of NGOs and community-based organisations is being tested. When programmes stall and promises cannot be fulfilled, communities lose trust — not only in individual organisations, but in civil society as a whole. This erosion of legitimacy is particularly concerning at a time when local resource mobilisation is being promoted as a pathway to sustainability. At a moment when many organisations are seeking to strengthen local fundraising, a paradox emerges: trust — the very foundation of local giving — is at risk of collapse. When citizens perceive NGOs and CBOs as unable to deliver, even for reasons beyond their control, their willingness to contribute time, effort, or resources diminishes.

Rebuilding or preserving legitimacy, therefore, is not a secondary task but a precondition for locally led development. Participants called for greater transparency and communication about external constraints, renewed accountability to communities, and a shift from transactional project delivery to relational engagement. Trust, they emphasised, must be treated as both an outcome and an investment — the social infrastructure that underpins sustainable change.

Recentralisation of power: Safeguarding local agency

What many had hoped would be a turning point toward localisation risks becoming a step backward. As funding contracts and competition intensify, organisations increasingly feel pressure to align with donor agendas, accept short-term, output-oriented projects, and deprioritise transformative or long-term work. The dialogue surfaced fears that dependency is reappearing in new forms — less visible, but equally constraining — undermining progress in shifting power and promoting local leadership.

At the same time, new donors and actors are entering the field — from local foundations and businesses to philanthropic institutions, new bilateral donors from emerging economies (such as India and China), and high-income Gulf states expanding their development engagement. While this diversification brings hope, it also raises critical questions about the nature of these partnerships. As one participant noted, "*There's talk of new donors, but without changing power relations, it's the same game with new players*".

In response, local organisations are asserting their agency by forming coalitions, diversifying funding, and negotiating partnerships on more equal terms. The invitation, then, is to safeguard this autonomy — to move from patronage to co-creation, where relationships are grounded in mutual accountability, trust, and the legitimacy of local leadership.

Power shifting, participants were reminded, must be preserved not through rhetoric, but through resources, representation, and respect.

Attrition of Civil Society: Preserving diversity and resilience

Participants warned of a gradual thinning of civic space. Smaller, grassroots, youth- and women-led organisations — those closest to communities — risk exhaustion or disappearance. Even those not directly affected by donor cuts find themselves overburdened, expected to fill gaps left by larger actors and government agencies. The result is an uneven ecosystem where flexibility and innovation survive, but under strain, and where diversity — of actors, perspectives, and approaches — is quietly diminishing.

Preserving this diversity is vital. Participants spoke of the need to strengthen the connective tissue of civil society — networks, mentoring, and shared platforms — and to fund not only projects, but the institutional resilience that enables continuity. The protection of smaller organisations, they stressed, is not a matter of charity; it is a matter of ecosystem health and democratic vitality. Civil society's resilience depends on its plurality — and that plurality must be intentionally safeguarded.

Invitations for renewal

Woven through these risks are invitations for collective renewal — not only to rebuild, but also to protect.
This is a call to partners, donors, and local actors alike to safeguard the legitimacy, diversity, and resilience of civil society, while transforming the systems and power relations that constrain it.

- **Secure legitimacy** by investing in transparency, accountability, and community dialogue, recognising trust as both a process and a product of cooperation.
- **Preserve local agency** by funding long-term partnerships rooted in mutual accountability and resisting the drift back toward donor-centric control.
- **Protect civic diversity** by supporting smaller and emerging organisations as vital carriers of innovation, inclusion, and connection.

Renewal depends on shared responsibility — to sustain trust, safeguard and deepen local agency, and protect the diversity that keeps civil society alive.

Table 2. Impact on communities, organisations, and partnerships

Area	Type of Impact	Description
Communities	Job & livelihood loss	Widespread job cuts; household income decline; food insecurity.
	Access to essential services	Reduced access to health care (HIV medication, vaccination), education (loss of scholarships), and nutrition.
	Disruption of education	Due to the impact on other areas of life, school attendance is negatively affected.
	Social strain & mental health	Suicides, domestic violence, early marriage, child labour, and community conflicts.
	Rising poverty / inequality	Economic strain, youth unemployment, and marginalised groups losing support.
	Erosion of trust	Communities feel abandoned as projects stop mid-way.
	Refugees & vulnerable groups	Refugees, PWDs, and girls are most affected by the loss of rehabilitation, protection, or training programmes.
	Climate stress	Reduced funding for climate and ecosystem projects.
Organisations	Funding & institutional fragility	Low income, difficulty in resource mobilisation, unachieved goals.
	Staffing/operations	Lay-offs, salary cuts, project suspension, burnout, and low morale.
	Institutional brittleness	Limited resilience, dependence on a single donor; collapse of some programmes.
	Erosion of legitimacy & reputation	Broken partnerships, reduced trust, loss of goodwill.
	Unequal vulnerability	Grass-root, youth, and women-led organisations are most affected; picking up grains at the end of the funding chain.
	Shift in focus	Long-term, capacity-building initiatives cut first; push to move to short-term, output-driven projects.
Partnerships	Loss / re-scaling of partnerships	Fewer external collaborations, shrinking civic space.
	Competition & fragmentation	Organisations compete for fewer funds; duplication of efforts.
	Resource imbalance	Foundations are overwhelmed; some close doors to new partners.
	Erosion of trust & legitimacy	Broken partnerships, aid no longer resonates morally.

Table 3. Avenues for the future

Theme / Area	Positive Trend or Strategy	Description / Illustration
Local resilience & resource mobilisation	Local fundraising, social enterprises, and self-help groups.	"We are finding ways to harness local resources." New revenue models reduce dependency.
Collaboration & coordination	Improved alignment among NGOs and with local government; cross-sector partnerships.	Avoiding duplication, sharing data, leveraging local institutions (banks, Rotary, etc.).
South–South and intra-African cooperation	Regional networks and mutual learning.	"Strengthen ties among ourselves before seeking outside support."
Technological adaptation	Using digital tools to cut costs, improve outreach, and civic engagement.	Online advocacy, digital resource mobilization and sharing, social-media-based accountability.
Re-negotiating power & knowledge	Shift from donor-driven to co-created, locally led models.	Fairer negotiations, mutual accountability, and recognition of African and Indigenous leadership.
Knowledge sovereignty & Indigenous perspectives	Valuing traditional and adaptive knowledge.	Indigenous pastoralist insight: "Start asking 'What do we already have?'"
Justice-based framing	Development is seen as equity and fairness, not charity.	"Treat development as justice"; links to governance and inclusion.
Governance & accountability reform	Addressing corruption, elite capture, and transparency gaps.	Calls for reforming tax systems, citizen monitoring, and domestic accountability.
New donors & private sector engagement	Private foundations and companies as partners, not patrons.	"New donors must be invited as partners, not patrons."
Learning & innovation	Crisis as a wake-up call for creativity and internal accountability.	"We are learning to do more with less."