



What Is EMpower to You in One Word?



This word cloud was created based on the responses of EMpower Board Directors and Staff, who were asked to describe EMpower in one word

Foreword

At EMpower's founding at the beginning of the millennium, it would have been hard to fathom the ensuing world events. EMpower's first logo incorporated New York's iconic Twin Towers yet, less than two years later, we experienced September 11. The years to come brought the global financial crisis of 2008, the COVID pandemic, wars on multiple continents, consequential elections, and accelerating climate crises in all the regions where we work. We have weathered each of these challenges with resolve, resilience, and agility because what we knew in 2000, and at every moment since, is that young people living in the margins faced even tougher circumstances and needed our belief and investment in them.



Cynthia Steele | EMpower President & CEO

While these 25 years have been punctuated by cataclysmic events, EMpower's journey shows the power of what is possible when a community of dedicated staff, loyal supporters, strong local organisations, and determined young people are committed to make a difference.

We have grown substantially: in our scope (with our grantee partners multiplying from a handful to more than 150), in our budget (from less than \$500,000 to \$10 million), in our footprint (from being incorporated in the US only to being incorporated in four other countries: Hong Kong, India, Singapore, and the UK), and in the diversity and excellence of our team (from three staff members to 42, across 13 countries). We have a vastly expanded and passionate network of supporters from the worlds of finance and philanthropy who believe in young people's potential and the soundness of EMpower's model to realise it. We have forged close links and collaborations with peer funders across philanthropy, thought leaders in academia, and experts in the youth development field—committed to collective impact, learning, and solidarity.

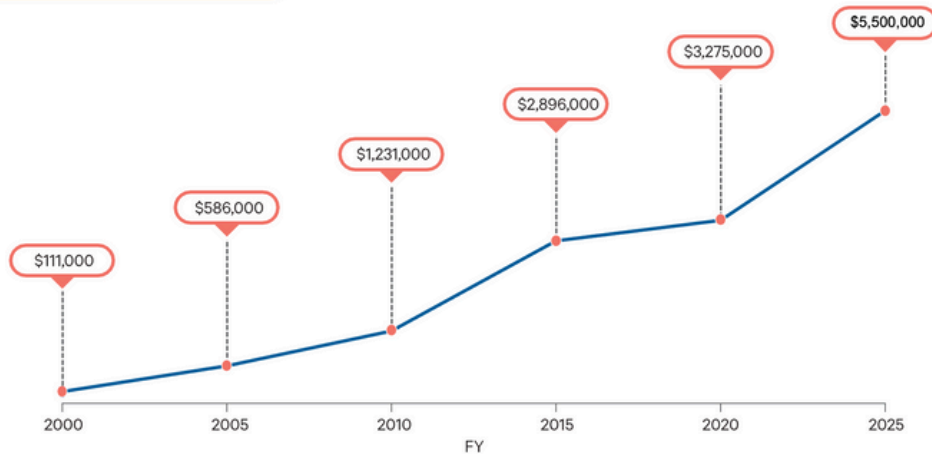
While we cannot influence world events, this quarter of a century has taught us that we can pivot and thrive, not just cope. In a world of change, what has remained constant is the community we have built, our shared values, and our joint assignment. That is to make real a vision by and for young people who are too often left behind—unlocking their ideas, dreams, and new pathways.

We are all in to do ever more.

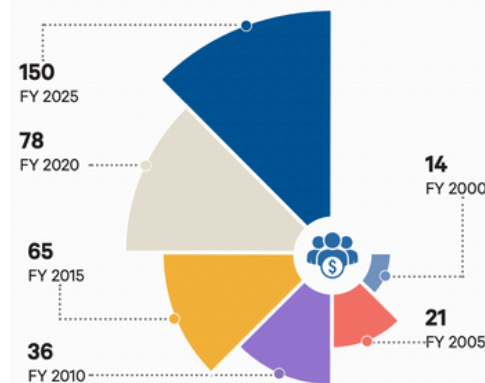


EMpower's Growth

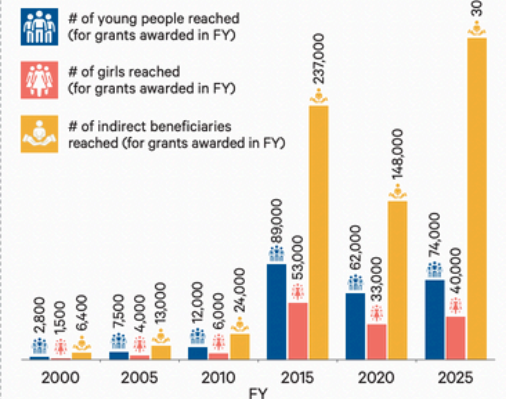
Grantmaking Budget (USD)



EMpower grantees



Impact



\$ grants awarded
through Dec 2024:
\$60,830,000



of grants awarded
through Dec 2024:
1,650



of grantee partner
organisations:
400



of young people
reached:
1,010,000



of girls
reached:
560,000



of indirect
beneficiaries:
3,600,000



Years of EMpower: Our Journey

For 25 years, EMpower has operated at the crucial intersection of finance and youth empowerment. By harnessing these powerful resources, we've supported young people to transform their lives and communities. As youth leadership gains momentum globally, and the finance sector rises to meet this potential, EMpower is positioned to steer critical investments in the next generation of change-makers.

Founded in 2000 by finance professionals who saw the social inequities in the emerging markets where they invested, EMpower was established to address these disparities and create lasting change. Today, EMpower is a trusted advisor that bridges the worlds of finance and social impact, providing essential resources, expertise, and funding to local organisations that are opening new pathways for young people.

Our Impact

We've positively affected over 1 million marginalised youth, including 500,000 girls, by supporting and partnering with nearly 400 local organisations in 15 emerging market countries. Through these partnerships, we've built a trusted network of organisations, supporters, and young leaders, sharing knowledge and amplifying what works to drive systemic change.

Our Role

EMpower invests in local organisations for up to 10 years, guided by the principles of trust and collaboration. Our model focuses on sustainable solutions that can scale across communities.

- **We are an incubator** that invests in innovative organisations driving the breakthrough approaches young people need now.
- **We are an accelerator** that strengthens organisations so they are able to advance effective initiatives that are informed by young people's experience and wisdom.

Our Distinct Advantage

We have a legacy of listening to and learning from young people, deep roots in the finance sector, and a locally-focused yet globally-connected network of grantees, donors, and peers. We address the most pressing challenges that young people face through:

- **Patient capital:** Our 10-year commitment encourages trust, collaboration, shared learning, and the foundations for durable change.
- **Calculated risk:** Smart philanthropy means taking risks. We invest so our partners innovate, experiment, and learn—and can scale solutions that are sustainable.
- **Amplifying successes:** We've built a model and a platform for our partners to collaborate and promote what works, which often leads to policy change, investments by other funders, and further uptake of best practices.



2000

EMpower Founded



In 2000, EMpower began supporting Ruchika's innovative platform schools in India, providing education and opportunities to thousands of children living and working on India's railway platforms



In early 2000s, EMpower supported Minga Peru in Peru with grants to deliver vital health information and services to isolated river communities in the Peruvian Amazon

Marta Cabrera

EMpower President (2005-2019) and Global Ambassador

Milestone 1

It all started with a simple yet powerful idea to give back!

In the late 1990s, Emerging Markets (EM) finance had become a mainstream asset class, and the number of people working in EM grew rapidly.

EMpower was founded by Craig Cramer in 2000. Travelling to emerging markets to deepen his understanding of the countries in which he was investing as an EM fund portfolio manager, he connected with civil society leaders implementing powerfully effective community-level strategies improving lives. He saw the potential to impact larger populations but also knew that such funding was not available to small community-based organisations.

He had this idea that his colleagues in the Wall Street emerging market community could be a source of funding that had never been tapped in an organised, sustained way, which led to his founding EMpower, based on two core principles:

- Funding locally developed community-based programs.
- Participatory approach with donors deciding which organisations get funded.

In 2000, EMpower was born.

From the beginning, a few core principles shaped our path to impact and continue to guide us today. First, we sought out existing local organisations already making a meaningful difference in their communities. We didn't want to reinvent the wheel but support those already doing the hard work on the ground. Second, we aimed to establish direct, communicative relationships with the organisations we supported. Finally, we fostered a participatory approach that allowed donors to get involved in philanthropic decision-making. And from there, we took off!



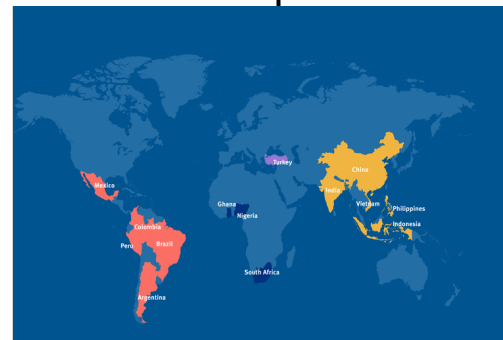
2004

Key Pillars of EMpower Established



Funding Local Organisations

Civil Association for Equality and
Justice, Argentina



EM Country Focus



Underwriting Model

Michael Hirschhorn | EMpower Board Director

Milestone 2

Hard to believe it's been 25 years! Of all of EMpower's milestones, I'm proudest of the role I played—in close collaboration with early Board members like Peter Clark, Piers Playfair, Guido Mosca, and Pedro Beroy—in helping to sharpen EMpower's key pillars in 2004. Through an in-depth planning process, we reinforced three unique organisational 'anchors'—

- [Support local organisations](#), as they are trusted by, embedded in, and committed to long-term investment in their own communities.
- [Focus on emerging market countries](#), as they naturally align with the commitments of EMpower's donor community. These countries are often overlooked by international donors due to economic indicators that, while steady, often mask major inequalities within the countries.
- [Develop an underwriting model](#) that ensures every dollar individuals donate directly benefits marginalised young people.

What's almost equally amazing is that alongside healthy reinterpretation and updating along the way, these three EMpower anchors have held strong ever since. And I've been honoured to engage as a proud EMpower US board member across that entire trajectory!



2005

Programme Strategy Focus Decided



Grantmaking Portfolios Determined

Livelihoods



EMpower supported Black Umbrellas in South Africa with grants for critical back-office services, business skills training, and seed funding for entrepreneurs

Education



EMpower supported Parivaar Education Society in India with grants to promote inclusive education and empower children with quality learning opportunities

Health and Well-being



EMpower began to support Centro Mujeres in Mexico to train youth health advocates

Robert Kushen | EMpower Board Director

Milestone 3

The “youth bulge” in much of the world represents huge challenges and opportunities for human flourishing.

In 2005, we decided to focus EMpower’s strategy on youth, especially girls and women, driven by data showing the immense challenges they face. At the time, the HIV pandemic was ravaging youth. Young people were also disproportionately affected by unemployment, while experiencing violence, exclusion, and discrimination.



Our focus on girls and young women stemmed from their position at the bottom of every social hierarchy. They are often the least visible and heard, and development indicators for girls and women serve as a bellwether for society.

We believed that EMpower’s support to civil society organisations could help youth unlock their potential, by equipping them with the skills and opportunities to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. We prioritised grassroots organisations that provide direct services, with long-term support enabling them to scale up their impact. Recognising the unique multiplicity of challenges marginalised young people face, we decided to provide comprehensive support through three pillars critical to youth development: health, education, and livelihoods. To this day, these pillars have remained central to EMpower’s work.

Today, with approximately 1.8 billion people aged 15-24 and that number increasing, EMpower’s strategy remains as relevant as ever. The opportunity to stay in school, maintain good health, receive family or community support, and eventually earn a steady income remain the cornerstones for a bright future.



2006

First Major Institutional Funding: Nike Foundation for Grassroots Girls Initiative



Nike Foundation became EMpower's first institutional funder, supporting Nishtha in advancing education for girls by addressing barriers like early marriage and school dropout



Through the Nike Foundation's Grassroots Girls Initiative, EMpower supported Sou da Paz to address gender-based violence, create safer spaces for youth, and promote the inclusion of girls in public spaces

Amy Babchek

Former Senior Manager, Nike Foundation

Milestone 4

In 2006, before the UN declared October 11th the International Day of the Girl Child, before Malala Yousafzai's courage made headlines, and before protests erupted in India demanding a safer society for girls, the world was only beginning to discuss how to include adolescent girls in the development process.

The Nike Foundation wanted to change that. We needed to find partners closest to girls' lives, work alongside them to problem-solve and drive resources to them.



EMpower was already identifying and funding local organisations that were doing just that while also asking grantees change-making questions.

The Nike Foundation provided EMpower with a grant as part of a larger consortium of funders called the Grassroots Girls Initiative. EMpower emerged as a leader in learning how to fund change-making strategies to empower adolescent girls. This included developing criteria to inform whom to fund, what additional internal support organisations need to advance girl-centred strategies, and how to build local networks of organisations for learning and action.

EMpower systematically applied lessons from each experiment in 'grantmaking plus' efforts, publicly sharing learning and tools along the way, making significant contributions to a body of knowledge around funding practices that not only include girls, but position them as political actors.



2006

EMpower Founded in the UK



Jonathan Bayliss, EMpower UK Co-founder, alongside Former EMpower Staff Member Lucie Kucharova and EMpower UK Directors Parvoleta Shtereva, Eric Dannheim, and Angella Heath



EMpower UK Summer Drinks with Board Members and Staff



Bradley Wickens, EMpower UK Co-founder, with Maurice Nadjar and Vincenzo Zinni, former UK Board Director



Some Members of the EMpower Team at the 2024 UK Annual Dinner

Brad Wickens | Former EMpower UK Board Chair

Milestone 5

Timing is so much in life. In the early 2000s, I lived in Brazil, experiencing life in an emerging economy firsthand while witnessing, through a US lens, the transformative potential of entrepreneurial philanthropy. Returning to the UK in 2006, I saw that the UK, especially its financial industry, viewed emerging countries as a business opportunity and particularly an investment and banking opportunity.

However, there was a need for a platform that would allow giving back transparently, responsibly, efficiently, and in a self-directed way.

EMpower US provided just that. The opportunity to replicate this model in the UK, leveraging the giving infrastructure and enhancing its capacity and bandwidth felt like a natural progression and the perfect synthesis of where my thinking was.

The demand for such an organisation was clear, and building a group of committed donors and board members was a relatively simple task.

EMpower UK has grown beyond that initial idea. It has become a philanthropic powerhouse with the same mission but far greater reach. Its innovation and dedicated staff have created an impact that exceeds our original vision. Looking back, I am deeply proud of the work EMpower UK continues to do and the lives it continues to change.



2008

First Learning Exchanges Held in India and Peru



Mawusi Awity | Founder, NEWIG, Ghana

Milestone 6

EMpower's role in NEWIG's journey has been profound, particularly through the transformative concept of learning exchanges—a hallmark of EMpower's work since 2010. EMpower has been a constant anchor for over a decade, guiding NEWIG as we empower women in Ghana. Whether through funding, capacity building, or facilitating cross-learning opportunities, EMpower has stood as a "big sister," fostering growth and development. This relationship has been instrumental in helping NEWIG uplift women from poverty, improve their socio-economic status, and break into nontraditional, male-dominated professions, ultimately creating long-lasting social impact.



Starting in 2012, EMpower supported NEWIG's training for women in diverse skills like soap making, bead jewellery crafting, fruit juice processing, yoghurt production, hand sanitizing gel production, and bakery and confectionery skills. These trainings were instrumental in empowering women with practical skills for economic independence and entrepreneurship skills, laying the foundation for future collaborations between EMpower and NEWIG. Then, in 2016, our partnership expanded to focus on non-traditional careers for women.

EMpower facilitated a cross-learning exchange with Azad Foundation in India, helping NEWIG pioneer training in commercial driving for young women in Ghana, breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields. This connection inspired lasting impact, with further exchanges in 2018 and a Ghana-based workshop in 2019. These learning exchanges offered invaluable insights and paved the way for NEWIG to make its programmes more relevant and effective for women seeking financial freedom.

Thanks to EMpower's support, NEWIG has strengthened its structure, expanded its reach, and solidified its vision to empower women. For us, celebrating your 25th anniversary commemorates a partnership that has enriched lives across borders.

Ayekoo (congratulations) to 25 years of a job well done!



2008

First Annual Dinner Held



Kunal Shah & Swatee Deepak, UK Board Co-Chairs



Marta Cabrera, President of EMpower, Aasha Pai, HK Board Co-Chair at Hong Kong Annual Dinner



James Donald, EMpower US Board Chair, along with Rekha Nair and Patricia Ahn, EMpower Board Directors



Fast forward to 2024, the Annual Dinner has grown into a highly anticipated event, recognised as a highlight of the year across the city and sector

Jeremy Llewelyn | Chair, Global Executive Committee

Milestone 7

On Tuesday, September 16th, 2008, EMpower UK held its first Annual Dinner at the Cafe Royal in London. 132 leaders from the EM finance community attended the event. It was a time of shock. The day before, Lehman Brothers had been declared bankrupt, Merrill Lynch had sold itself to Bank of America, and, on the day of the dinner itself, the Dow suffered its largest one-day points drop in history.

The speakers that night included Ms. Ikoghode Ehita Fatima from EMpower partner Girls Power Initiative in Nigeria, supported by Brad Wickens and EMpower Founder, Marta Cabrera. After dinner, I was astounded as the audience pledged over \$400,000—no auction, no raffle, no grandstanding—just a community quietly coming together to support the most marginalised youth globally, the very group most vulnerable to the short and long-term implications of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.



This amount was more than EMpower had ever raised before, establishing the Annual Dinner as a key event in the UK calendar. It marked a pivotal point in our history, confirming the deep commitment of our donors. To this day, most of the attendees from 2008 still join the Annual Dinner every year, with the event now filling to capacity with 400 participants, who continue to pledge extraordinary amounts. The November 2024 Annual Dinner in London raised a record \$2.6 million!

The US Annual Dinner, modelled after this, began in 2010. Finance communities in Hong Kong and Singapore have adopted this successful formula, and we are now working towards similar events in Dubai and Delhi. These gatherings of finance leaders taking action in support of education, health, and livelihoods have become a hallmark of our approach.

Echoes of the same generosity and commitment were seen again in 2020 when the US Annual Dinner raised a new record amount despite extreme market volatility. On the same day, New York issued orders for COVID lockdowns.

As international trade and aid face increasing disruption, once again, the most marginalised communities will suffer the greatest impacts.

Our local grassroots partner organisations are best placed to deliver EMpower's support where it's needed most efficiently, and we give our heartfelt thanks to our donors for their trust over the last 25 years in helping us make this happen.



2009

Approval of 10-Year Partnerships



Asociación Kallpa, Peru



Vacha Charitable Trust, India



East Bali Poverty Project, Indonesia



Hua Dan, China



Amandla EduFootball, South Africa



Mother Child Education, Turkey

EMpower recognised early on that long-term funding is essential for building and sustaining impactful youth programmes. In 2009, we formalised this commitment by adopting a policy to support grantee partners for up to ten years.

Ricardo Calçado | Founder, Onda Solidária, Brazil

Milestone 8

**First of all, congratulations EMpower on this milestone!!
We are proud to be part of this family and history.**

For Onda Solidária, EMpower means our dream is coming true—the dream of many Brazilian children, youth, and communities. Through our partnership, we were able to develop Onda into a community reference point with many young leaders making a difference locally and globally. This long-term partnership is so important, as it allowed the organisation to grow from a seed to a tree, now generating new seeds worldwide. This model is not just unique but fundamental—it's why we're able to do what we do today.



EMpower listened to us, understood our mission, paid attention to our challenges and goals, believed in us, and supported us gently and step-by-step.

With EMpower, we saw a massive difference in our organisation's journey—it helped us reflect on our mission, values, and short- and long-term plans. Through EMpower, we gained the stability to plan and make a meaningful impact, ensuring security for our team and programme participants. EMpower also opened the doors to new opportunities, methodologies, and connections for us to learn, grow and fulfill our dreams.

We've learned so much and felt so empowered that EMpower's support has propelled us to new levels. Thanks to EMpower, we see a bright, sustainable future for Onda Solidária to continue making an impact.

We feel like true ambassadors of EMpower's important work, which brings joy, hope and love to adolescents, young people, and families around the world. Muito obrigado, EMpower for making the world a better place. May this milestone be the beginning of many more years and achievements ahead. With love and gratitude from Onda Solidária.



2009

Launched the NoVo Partnership and Introduced Spark & Ignite Grants to Champion Gender-Focused Initiatives



Network of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (NEED)

Grantees we supported through these grants benefited from initiatives such as small Spark and Ignite grants, which were designed to inspire creativity in girls' programming.



Girls Power Initiative, Nigeria



VANGO, Vietnam

Jody Myrum | Former Director, Initiative to Advance Adolescent Girls' Rights, NoVo Foundation

Milestone 9

EMpower plays a critical role in the girls' funding infrastructure, mobilising and moving resources to smaller organisations working deep in communities. Funding organisations like EMpower was an important part of our strategy because, as a large private funder with staff based in New York, it was harder for us to fund these kinds of organisations. It required deep relationships in and connection to communities—to find and move resources to these organisations which EMpower has built over time.



Funding EMpower was also important because, as a movement funder, we understood deeply that girls are relevant to every movement, sector and social change strategy, and therefore, we supported organisations who could reach girls through a range of movements and sectors. Engaging in non-traditional funding approaches is extremely important for girls to thrive, and yet too often, traditional strategies and programmes focus on older boys, leaving girls without the same opportunities. EMpower played a critical role in supporting their partners to spark programmes and initiatives focused on girls, and in some communities, supported learning communities for girls and their allies. Further, there are few funders that prioritise younger adolescent girls, so when they decided to focus on them in their strategy, they created funding opportunities for an otherwise overlooked population.

We are grateful for the role that organisations like EMpower play in moving resources to girls and young people—those at the forefront of creating change in their communities!



2010

Focused Efforts on Promoting Non-Traditional Livelihoods for Young Women



LAHI supports young women in India by offering vocational training in male-dominated fields like electrical wiring, gardening, landscaping, welding, carpentry, etc



CEDECUR helps young women Colombia acquire the skills they need to secure and maintain employment in the formal sector through vocational and entrepreneurship training



Azad Foundation in India empowers young women with skills to secure jobs and thrive in traditionally male-dominated industries



Urbanet empowers young women in Ghana's Northern and Savannah regions by providing vocational training in modern, transformative beekeeping practices

Dolon Ganguly | Chief Functionary, and Meenu Vadera | Secretary, Azad Foundation, India

Milestone 10

EMpower stands apart and stands tall because of its unconventional and disruptive vision, which puts young girls and boys from marginalised communities at its core. No wonder it has built a giant legacy in the world of giving that few other institutions have. EMpower has been a unique donor who did not require convincing on why nontraditional livelihoods such as driving could unlock transformational change in women's lives. Typically, marginalised women in India engage in informal gender stereotypical work that offers low pay and no security.



For women facing these barriers, nontraditional roles provide economic independence and challenge gender norms.

Azad chose driving for its low entry barriers and potential within India's growing transport sector. EMpower's support for our Women on Wheels programme enabled women to break societal constraints on mobility, becoming "citizens of the road."

Women who have been through this journey with Azad are today in a completely different orbit of their lives. They drive taxis and buses here and trailers in Europe, establishing their presence with panache and aplomb that need to be seen and believed. Our drivers are investing in their families, challenging violence, and transforming community mindsets.

EMpower's visionary partnership has been essential year after year. Their long-term support has allowed us to foster real change, building a philanthropic model grounded in trust, patience, and respect for our work.



2011

EMpower Incorporates in HK



Snippets of our board, staff, and supporters in Hong Kong—connecting with grantee partners, attending Annual Dinners, and building impactful memories over the years

Madeline Foo | Co-founder, EMpower HK

Milestone 11

Going global was the natural next step for EMpower, aligning with the expanding footprint of EM professionals. My involvement with EMpower started with a personal recommendation from a dear friend in UK, who arranged a meeting with Brad Wickens, an enthusiastic advocate of EMpower and its mission. The timing was fortuitous, as I was about to move to Hong Kong for work.

Incorporating in Asia was a strategic move for EMpower, as the region was becoming a hub for NGOs funding projects beyond their borders. EMpower registered in Hong Kong due to the presence of a pool of EM professionals who were familiar with our work with marginalised young people in emerging market countries.

At the time, our directors were primarily EM professionals who wanted to engage actively in addition to funding EMpower. Our grantmaking model and areas of focus resonated with them. Today, a few directors from 2010 remain on the Hong Kong-Singapore board, while others have moved on to the leadership council or continue to support us as Underwriters and active donors.



2012

First In-Country Programme Officer and Launch of Adolescent Girls Learning Community in Mumbai



Jayanthi Pushkaran, introducing girls and mentors to the LC model



All the mentors from the 2013 Mumbai LC



Learning Community Programme Guide was created in 2023 with a 6 member girls editorial board



Learning Community completes 10 years

Nisha Dhawan

Vice President Impact & Influence

Milestone 12

Today, we have solidified our global reach by increasing staff presence and leadership in the countries where we implement programmes, with our whole programme team based in a country where we have programmes. We began this journey in 2012 when I was hired as EMpower's first in-country programme officer in Delhi. Over the years, we have continued to prioritise local knowledge, language skills and deep-rooted connections, enabling us to amplify the voices of young people, our partners and their communities.

Our local presence in 2012 not only deepened partnerships with our partners but also made it possible to launch our first Adolescent Girls Learning Community in Mumbai in 2012. By delivering the programme in Hindi, we could design and implement curricula directly with the adolescent girls. The Learning Community is an EMpower programme and at the beating heart of our meaningful youth engagement work, with girls in the driving seat defining and addressing issues in their own communities—from installing streetlights to changing police patrol routes and joining village councils.



Over time, The Learning Community spread its wings from Mumbai to Delhi and Rajasthan. With the development of a robust model in the form of a programme guide and collaborations with peers, its reach has travelled globally to Bangladesh, Nepal, Niger, and Syria. Today, our flagship model for girls' leadership is empowering girls worldwide.



2012

EMpower Conducts Its First Grantee Perception Report



Caitlin Mitchell, Senior Manager, Impact & Partnerships, and Former Programme Officer, Theodoros Chronopoulos, with our long-term partner, United Through Sport in South Africa

Caitlin Mitchell

Senior Manager, Impact & Partnerships

Milestone 13

EMpower is—and has always been—a learning organisation, regularly setting aside time to reflect on what is working well and identifying areas for improvement. While we have annual Programme Team reflection exercises and seek feedback from grantee partners through their reports, 2012 marked a significant milestone with the launch of our first Grantee Perception Report (GPR).

This was an important step for EMpower, signalling a more rigorous approach to our learning processes. The GPR is an externally administered survey that gathers anonymous feedback on our grantmaking practices from grantee partners. The results are then used to benchmark EMpower's performance against other funders. As the gold standard for obtaining honest feedback from partners, the GPR has become a critical tool in our continuous development.

We continue to conduct GPRs every few years, each providing valuable insights that help refine our practices. The feedback also highlights what we are doing right and how we compare to other funders. For example, our most recent GPR ranked EMpower in the top 3 out of 300 foundations for how we support community-based organisations to strengthen and grow.



2013

First Citi E-for-Education Campaign



Citi E for Education campaign enabled EMpower to support EGED in Turkey to develop accessible educational materials for visually impaired students



Citi Team at our US Annual Dinner



EMpower Staff and Youth Fellow at Citi event in South Africa



EMpower Staff at Citi event in the UK

Caryn Leventhal | Former Managing Director of North America, Head of FX Real Money Sales, Citi

Milestone 14

Citi's E for Education began with a clear conviction: access to education is transformative. It changes lives, breaks cycles of poverty, and builds a foundation for sustainable development. In 2013, we saw an opportunity to align Citi's FX trading capabilities with this powerful purpose, linking business success to social impact. Launched as a \$1 donation for every \$1 million traded on Citi's FX Velocity platform, E for Education connected the global FX market to a social cause, turning routine trades into opportunities to support educational access.

The programme was not only a way to give back but also a mechanism to engage clients in the initiative, encouraging them to contribute to something bigger. By making education a shared mission, we could collectively generate financial growth and educational opportunities in some of the world's most underserved regions.



From the start, E for Education partnered with six carefully selected nonprofits, each focused on driving educational impact. Among them, EMpower stood out as a perfect match for our goals. Its commitment to youth in emerging markets resonated deeply with our clients, who invest based on macroeconomic trends in these countries. Over the last 11 years, Citi has donated \$9.2 million to EMpower, impacting over 178,000 marginalised young people—including 103,000 girls. This funding has enabled young people to stay in school, improve academic outcomes, and access skills essential for the future, ultimately lifting prospects for entire communities.

Receiving the Citi CEO Progress Award for Most Innovative Client Solution in 2018 for E for Education was a proud moment. The award underscored the campaign's unique impact as a scalable model that marries profit with purpose. However, personally, one of the most exciting outcomes has been the legacy of improving communities in many countries where my clients and I conduct business.

Today, as E for Education continues successfully, witnessing the journey from an idea to a sustained movement has been humbling. And with funders like EMpower expanding opportunities for youth, this mission remains more vital than ever.



2014

With and For Girls Launched With EMpower as a Founding Partner



With and for Girls Panel (Delhi and Mumbai)

Swatee Deepak | UK Board Co-Chair

Milestone 15

When we set up the With and For Girls Collective at Stars Foundation in 2014, there were hardly any national or global funds focused on funding girl-led groups, and virtually none put any decision-making in the hands of girls. It meant so much to have EMpower—well-established and regarded for funding young people—as one of the first three funds to join us. Quickly, we grew to 8 organisations: EMpower, Global Fund for Children, MamaCash, Malala Fund, Novo Foundation, Nike Foundation, Plan International, Frida - The Young Feminist Fund, and Stars Foundation.



Within months, we created a global Awards programme and disbursed \$1 million to girl-led and girl-centred groups globally. Adolescent girls around the world made all the decisions on our funding. EMpower was critical in helping set up these girl-led panels for the Asia Pacific and Americas region.

At a time when girls were vastly overlooked, underfunded and underestimated, looking back at that period makes me proud. We showed how powerful girls are and recognised their potential to shape a better world for themselves and us. We set up the world's first global participatory fund, by and for adolescent girls.

We live in a far-from-perfect world, and despite those achievements, there is much work still to do. While much work remains, when I was asked to join the EMpower UK Board four years back, and then Co-Chair with Kunal, I jumped at the chance. As a child of India, an emerging market, I am humbled by how EMpower blends social justice philanthropy with finance. EMpower is such a progressive and leading funder: It partners with locally led groups, gives unrestricted/core funding, funds them for the long-term, is heavily invested in girls AND was founded and underwritten by the emerging market finance industry.

Although the world feels overwhelmed with volatility and crises, working with EMpower and seeing its commitment towards young people and visionary communities is a reminder that brighter times are always ahead.



2014

Refined Programme Strategy to Deepen Focus on Organisational Strengthening and Cross-Learning



Learning exchange in Indonesia



Learning exchange in Mexico



Learning exchange in South Africa



Learning exchange in Ghana

From the team at Pamflet Generasi, Indonesia

“The most memorable thing for me then was the situation where Pamflet, as a new organisation, was trusted to pilot innovative and experimental approaches in SRHR education” – Maulida Raviola, Pamflet Generasi’s General Coordinator of 2015-2016.

EMpower’s commitment to empowering youth and strengthening local organisations has been crucial in Pamflet’s growth. This support has been valuable as a youth-led organisation in Indonesia focused on human rights and adolescent health (SRHR and mental health). Over our 9 years of partnership, EMpower has played a pivotal role in advancing our implementation of Suka Ria Remaja (SSR – The Joy of Adolescence)



Since 2015, EMpower has supported Pamflet in SRHR capacity-strengthening across Palu (Central Sulawesi), Indramayu, Bandung, Bogor (West Java), and Jakarta. EMpower provided Pamflet with the spaces to experiment and strengthen our sense of agency as a youth organisation. Beyond project funding, EMpower’s core support during financial challenges enabled us to strengthen vital internal structures like HR and fundraising, which are instrumental in building long-term resilience and sustainability.

During the pandemic, EMpower invested in Pamflet’s capacity to adapt, using agile learning and visual facilitation to strengthen online outreach and flexibility. EMpower’s trust and patience in our mandate as a youth-led organisation and the challenges that come with it have enabled our newer staff to grow professionally and gain confidence.

EMpower’s commitment to meaningful youth engagement is reflected in creating safe spaces for meaningful youth participation and leadership, valuing lived experiences and perspectives. Pamflet proudly supported EMpower in implementing the Youth Consultation and Youth Fellowship Programme, centring young voices to shape EMpower’s organisational strategy. This trust inspired Pamflet to lead AwareNest, the SRHR Community of Practice in E/SE Asia, fostering cross-learning while enabling a collaborative and empowering exchange among grantee partners.

Through EMpower’s trust, Pamflet has grown as an organisation, expanding our impact across Indonesia and experiencing interconnectedness and solidarity as part of a network of SRHR practitioners in E/SE Asia.



2016

Intentional Focus on Mental Health started in South Africa



Khululeka Grief Support, an EMpower grantee partner in South Africa, helps young women build resilience and confidence through trauma-informed programmes



Snippets from the 2022 South Africa Convening on Mental Health Programming, featuring partners and young people sharing insights and experiences

Deborah Diedericks

Senior Programme Officer, South Africa

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as the ability to act with agency in environments that support best efforts to reach potential, the capacity to build meaningful relationships, the skills to adapt and cope with adversity and common stresses of life, and to contribute to one's community.



In 2016, in South Africa, we pivoted to focus on organisations deeply committed to developing and strengthening the mental health of young people through creative, non-stigmatised community support. This shift came after we realised that, while 65% of young people enrolled in economic wellbeing programmes found jobs, only half remained employed six months later. In South Africa and globally, mounting evidence shows that strengthening the mental health of young people leads to improved educational, health and economic outcomes.

Since EMpower's founding in 2000, we have prioritised building the life skills of young people. Today, we are deepening and refining our life skills programming globally by investing in mental health support. We fund 150+ organisations in 15 Emerging Markets countries, all committed to providing access to safe, reliable adults who build caring relationships with young people, and to developing emotional self-regulation, self-esteem, self-confidence, and hope for the future.



2017

EMpower Incorporates in Singapore and India



EMpower India Staff and Board at a Giving Circle event



Aasha Pai, HK Board Co-Chair and Liza Green, US Board Director



Ben Hall and Neil Harvey, both of whom have served as HK Board Chairs



Maddy Foo at EMpower Annual Dinner in Singapore

Aleem Jivraj and Aasha Pai | HK Board Co-Chairs

Aleem: My first interaction with EMpower was in January 2016 when I attended a grants meeting. The quality of the materials, including the level of due diligence on our grantee partners and the measurement of impact, left me hugely impressed. The focus areas – health, education and livelihoods – and working with young people resonated with me, and I knew this was an organisation I wanted to work with more closely. Within a few months, I joined the Hong Kong board, and the rest is history!



Aasha: I first heard about EMpower in 2012 when Maddy Foo invited me to a salon dinner featuring one of our grantee partners from China. I immediately saw that EMpower's mission of helping young people thrive and its specific pillars aligned with my professional journey, and where I wanted to invest. What prompted me to join the Board was the “how” of EMpower: patient capital, building and supporting grassroots organisations, and ensuring efficiency and impact, all aspects of philanthropy I had seen as best practices worldwide.

Singapore has become a leading Asian philanthropic centre in the last few years, with the government providing additional support to several family offices and foundations that are setting up here. We established a development presence in Singapore and started hosting annual dinners in the last 3 years. These dinners have grown in terms of the number of guests and funds raised yearly. We are grateful for the passion and generosity of our supporters in Singapore. Our presence here has allowed us to open doors with many other funders and charity organisations at the forefront of innovation.

India is our largest grantmaking region with an amazing in-country team. Given our strong programme expertise and changes in the funding landscape, it made sense for us to establish a local entity. With the growth of philanthropic capital and expertise in Asia and complementing our presence in Hong Kong, the incorporation of EMpower in Singapore and India in the last few years will take our impact and influence to another level.



2018

Girls Advisory Council (GAC) Launched in India



Girl Advisory Council Launch, Delhi, 2018



GAC at the NTL Conference, 2019



GAC 2.0 at EMpower Board Meeting, 2023

Seema Dosad | GAC Member and Former Participant of the Adolescent Girls Learning Community

Milestone 19

Participating in EMpower's Girls Advisory Council was an incredibly enriching experience. It provided a unique platform to connect with peers with similar challenges and aspirations, fostering a strong sense of community. Through our discussions and collaborative projects, I developed essential skills such as leadership, effective communication, and critical thinking—skills that have enhanced my ability to articulate my ideas confidently and advocate for issues that matter to us as girls.



Listening to adolescent girls and young women is crucial for EMpower and similar organisations. This demographic represents a powerful voice in shaping the future of our communities. By creating a platform for girls to share their perspectives, EMpower validates our experiences and empowers us to drive meaningful change. Our insights can inform programmes and initiatives, ensuring they are relevant and impactful.

Furthermore, offering young women the opportunity to engage in decision-making processes cultivates a sense of ownership and responsibility. It nurtures the next generation of leaders, encouraging us to take the initiative in addressing social issues. Ultimately, when organisations prioritise the voices of girls and young women, they create the foundation for more equitable outcomes and a brighter future for all. This inclusive approach is essential for effecting lasting change, and I feel grateful to have been a part of such an important initiative.



2020

EMpower Updates Its Theory of Change and Grantmaking Model



These photos are part of our youth photo essays, created to celebrate EMpower's 25th anniversary

Daniel Parnetti

Regional Programme Director, Latin America

In 2020, we embarked on an important journey by developing our first formal Theory of Change—a major milestone for EMpower! This process brought our whole team together to reflect on our work, the challenges we aim to tackle, and how to best approach them. Though we already had a strong sense of purpose, it was a fantastic opportunity to ensure everyone was on the same page.



We began by defining the problem: millions of young people in emerging countries lack the resources, skills, and opportunities to thrive. At the same time, we saw the incredible potential in local civil society organisations that have great solutions but often struggle to find the necessary funding. That's where EMpower comes in.

As our Theory of Change outlines, we provide vital support through long-term, flexible funding to our grantee partners and the young people they serve. We stand by them for up to ten years, knowing that real social change takes time and commitment. We also support the often-overlooked work behind the scenes—like covering rent and utilities—so our partners can focus on their programmes.

We believe that strong programmes are built by strong organisations. That's why we go beyond core grants to invest in capacity-building for our partners, helping them improve areas like governance, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, and safeguarding. We see ourselves as incubators, aiming for our partners to become fully sustainable and able to thrive independently by the end of their ten-year journey with us.

And if that's not enough, we truly believe in building equitable, trust-based relationships with our grantees, valuing their expertise and knowledge while encouraging them to push for progress toward our shared goals.



2022

EMpower's Annual Operating Budget Surpasses \$10 Million



Red Nose Foundation, Indonesia

Adam Heuman

Vice President Development and Marketing

I knew about EMpower long before joining the organisation. At the time, I held what I thought was my dream role: Deputy CEO of a global NGO reaching 10 million girls across 150 countries. Since my late 20s, I had been driven to build a career in the charitable sector, choosing it over consulting to make a meaningful impact. However, the reality of that job differed from my expectations.

Though deeply committed to the NGO's mission, I grew increasingly frustrated by the inefficiencies and short-term focus plaguing our work. Donations flowed from the UK to global headquarters, then to regional offices, then national offices, local staff—and, finally, to local grantee partners. By the time funds reached communities, much of the original amount had diluted. Shockingly, every major charity I admired operated similarly. I began to wonder if there was an alternative that genuinely prioritised local impact.



That's when EMpower caught my attention. Unlike others, EMpower's local partners were at the top of the funding pyramid. Our model focused on long-term impact, offering both funding and capacity-building support to create transformative change. Plus, with an efficient financial model, 100% of donations went directly to where they were most needed. I couldn't understand why a model this effective was raising only \$5M annually.

The potential to do more was enormous.

Since joining, I've worked alongside a talented team, dedicated programme staff, and an inspiring Board to help realise this potential. Over the past few years, we've grown our global income from \$5M to \$10M annually. Originally, 70% of our income came from individual donors, but we've since diversified, with individuals now accounting for 50% of our funding. We've expanded partnerships with corporations and institutional investors while staying true to our mission of empowering local partners and enabling them to thrive.

The potential for further growth is enormous, and with my team, I am focused on how we can continue to build on this foundation. Moving forward, we're committed to growing through sustainable income sources that allow our partners to best support young people. For us, it's not about shortcuts or bigger numbers—it's about the collective impact we create as a community of dedicated investors.



2023

EMpower Embeds Meaningful Youth Engagement Strategy and Youth Fellows in All Regions



Youth Fellows, South Africa



Youth Fellows, Mexico



Youth Fellows, Indonesia

Chrisyanto Wibisono | Youth Fellow, Indonesia

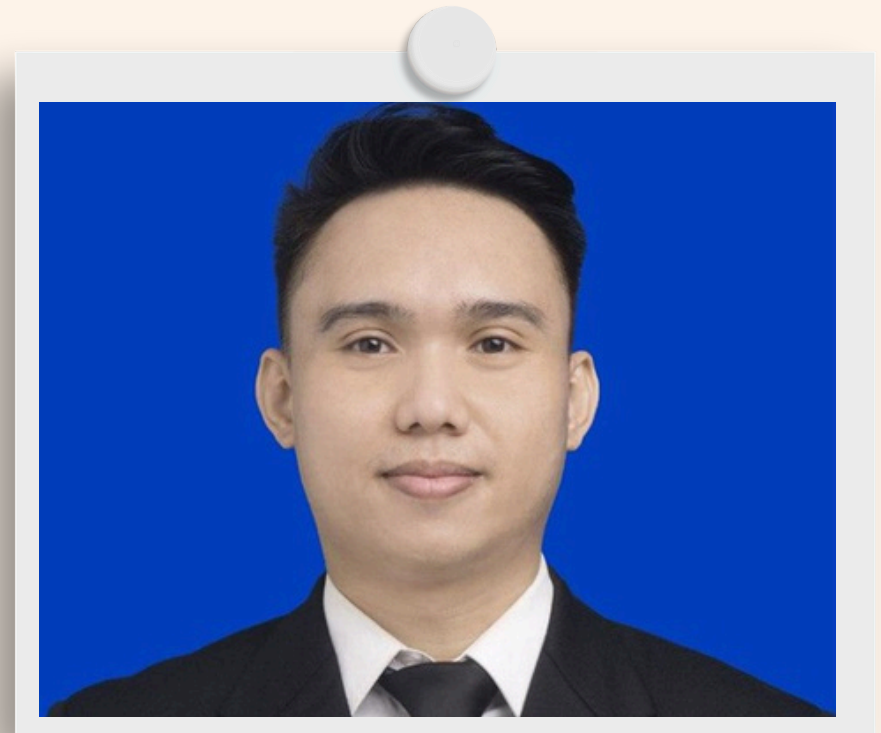
Milestone 22

NGOs and foundations should raise the voices of young people and listen to insights derived from their lived experiences because aligning with their aspirations will enrich an organisations' knowledge, broaden horizons and introduce new perspectives.

Listening to young people's voices shows humility and acknowledges their important role in social change. It recognises that today's youth have different experiences than previous generations. Organisations should support young people, value their existence, honour them as the next generation, and cultivate empathy, creativity, and the ability to navigation of power. By involving young people in decision-making in a programme, organisations give young people a sense of belonging, community and social purpose.

NGOs and foundations must avoid tokenism—where young people are only represented to appear inclusive, but their ideas and experiences are disregarded during programme development and implementation. The agency and aspirations of young people should not be wasted on “youth-washing” agendas.

EMpower has done a good job engaging with young people by offering opportunities and trust, enabling them to be self-sufficient and positive influencers.



2024

**All Programme Staff Based In-Country:
Argentina, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia,
Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Turkey**



Mireille Posse

Senior Programme Officer, Latin America

I'll highlight four key aspects where locally-based staff adds value to EMpower, grantees and young people:

1. Deep Cultural Understanding and Contextual Relevance

Local staff bring invaluable cultural knowledge and an understanding of social norms, values, and traditions. This allows us to engage more effectively with grantees and young people, speaking the local languages and communicating in ways that make them feel more comfortable and confident. We don't just translate—we interpret the local realities, offering informed perspectives and insights to help grantees succeed. Being based locally allows us to quickly adapt strategies in response to local dynamics, such as political shifts, social movements or economic challenges that can impact programme implementation.



2. Trust-Building and Relationship Development

Building trust is essential for strong partnerships, especially in regions where international funders may face skepticism or have a history of imposing requirements that don't align with the local context. By being present and actively engaged, local staff can develop stronger, more authentic relationships with grantees. The trust we establish leads to open communication about challenges and needs, creating a safe space for partners to share difficulties. This enables EMpower to provide more targeted and meaningful real-time support in addressing their issues.

3. Enhanced Support for Capacity Building and Tailored Assistance

Being locally based enables us to offer hands-on support, such as workshops, mentoring, and other capacity-building initiatives directly relevant to grantees' needs. Our presence ensures that these efforts are practical, actionable, and sustainable. We are better placed to connect them with consultants who truly understand their challenges. We also visit partners regularly, observing programmes in action, providing real-time feedback and championing their efforts, regardless of the organisation's size.

4. Cross-Pollination of Knowledge and Best Practices

With staff in multiple countries, we can facilitate the exchange of best practices across regions. Local staff bring valuable insights from global partners, enriching the learning ecosystem and fostering creativity and collaboration. For example, we have integrated mental health strategies from South Africa into our work in Latin America, adapting successful solutions to local contexts.



2024

EMpower Reaches its Millionth Young Person



SiKanda, Mexico

Nhlalala Baloyi | Youth Fellow, South Africa

As an EMpower Youth Fellow, I feel inspired by EMpower's milestone of reaching one million marginalised young people globally. Knowing that so many lives have been positively impacted brings hope for my own community in South Africa, where young people face challenges in health, education, and employment.



EMpower's programmes make a real difference by giving young people the tools, support, and confidence to overcome these challenges, unlocking future opportunities.

In my community, I see how youth-focused programmes provide crucial resources that help break cycles of poverty, improve mental wellbeing, and open pathways to jobs and education. This kind of support empowers us to succeed not just individually but to uplift our communities as well.

For EMpower's future, my advice is to continue listening closely to young voices and adapting programmes to meet our evolving needs. Expanding programmes that consider local and global challenges will help EMpower reach even more young people and provide them with the tools and opportunities they need. This milestone shows the power of sustained support, and I'm excited to see how EMpower continues to create lasting impact for young people around the world.



2024

EMpower Surpasses \$50 Million in Dollars Awarded



Project Khel, India

April Yip | Programme Officer, ESE Asia

Milestone 25

EMpower awarding over US\$50 million to local organisations is something we are proud of but surpassing this milestone is beyond a financial achievement. It embodies the trust of all our supporters and their belief in young people and our partner organisations. It reflects the collective, concerted and long-term dedication of countless individuals and groups striving for meaningful change in young people's lives.

Every dollar we invest contributes to building meaningful partnerships beyond funding alone. We maximise impact by sourcing effective programmes, staying flexible in fund usage, and creating platforms for our partners and young people to share innovative solutions to the challenges they face. AwareNest, a partner-led Community of Practice (CoP) focused on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in East and Southeast Asia, is a prime example. The CoP enables partners to establish reciprocal relationships, develop a shared repertoire of resources, and self-organise regular learning exchanges with rotating leadership, making the knowledge-sharing truly collaborative.



In my role as Programme Officer for East and Southeast Asia, I've witnessed the transformative effects of EMpower's support firsthand. A compelling example is Nguyễn Thị Huyền Nga, a young woman whose life changed through the 2D design programme at REACH, a grantee partner in Vietnam. Despite significant personal hardships, she transformed from a shy girl into a confident design professional with newfound optimism. As she prepares to chase bigger dreams, Nguyen's journey exemplifies the power of resilience and the unlimited potential of young people.

A recent reflection from Virtualahan, our partner in the Philippines underscores the impact of EMpower's tailored safeguarding consultations. 'These sessions have provided practical insights for crafting effective policies, translating safeguarding principles into the organisation's culture, and fostering a safe space for children and young people.'

At EMpower, we believe young people are valued experts. One of our Youth Fellows shared, "The fellowship showed me the significance of young people's meaningful involvement in decision-making processes." EMpower has succeeded in placing young people's rights and voices at the forefront, and I am inspired by this approach!

As we celebrate EMpower's 25th anniversary, these stories remind us of the profound impact our collective efforts and investments can have. For me, creating opportunities for young people to shape our grantmaking strategies is the most special ingredient in that US\$50 million investment, as it sharpens our approach and ensures that the next US\$500 million will have an even greater and more meaningful impact.



Our Commitments for the Future

At this pivotal moment, we are making five commitments to further advance our mission and the field:

We commit to being a flexible incubator and accelerator:

We will remain a strategic partner for bold solutions, supporting organisations in low-resource settings and building their capacity to deliver effective, cutting-edge programmes with and for young people.

- Broadening impact: We will continue applying risk-based investment strategies across education, livelihoods, and health.
- Maintaining our local focus: We will continue to invest in organisations that have a deep understanding of their local contexts and align funding with country-specific strategies.
- Carrying out our long-term vision: Our 10-year incubation approach will ensure that our partners have the time and resources for durable change.

We commit to amplifying youth voices, prioritising what has most relevance for them

We will continue to shift power and resources to young people, staying responsive to their evolving needs and ensuring that they have the agency to shape their own futures. We will achieve this by:

- Listening to and learning from young people: We intend to become ever more youth-forward, creating opportunities for young people to shape our work. Gender justice will remain central to what we do.
- Being responsive to emerging challenges: We will address key issues such as climate resilience, crisis response, and leveraging technology for good, ensuring our efforts align with the evolving needs of young people.

We commit to strengthening our alliance with the finance sector:

We will further enhance our powerful link with the finance sector to drive smart money behind smart solutions.

- Diversifying donors: We will expand and diversify our donor base and capitalise on our complementary expertise.
- Supporting operational costs: Our Underwriters and Leadership Council will continue to cover our operational costs, ensuring 100% of funds raised go directly to programmes.

We commit to facilitating collaboration among and between diverse stakeholders:

Building bridges and creating opportunities and knowledge-sharing among local organisations, young people, peer institutions, and donors.

- Expanding and leveraging our global network: We will continue to forge and strengthen alliances, with the goal of expanding resourcing and best practice in philanthropy and in youth development for systemic change.
- Promoting replicable practices: We will continue to amplify effective approaches on a global stage, disseminating our learnings and serving as a cross pollinator of ideas to build strong multi-stakeholder alliances.

We commit to leading by example:

We will ensure our staff and Board reflect and live by our values, including transparency and integrity, and uphold the highest standards.

- Advancing diversity and inclusion: We will continue growing a diverse community of staff, collaborators, Board members, and Leadership Council.
- Exercising financial rigor: We will maintain our reputation for effective financial management and good governance.
- Enhancing local presence: We will strengthen leadership in the countries and communities where we work, investing in our local teams and creating spaces and opportunities for them to thrive.

Conclusion

While we cannot predict the world of 2050, we know what will still be true for EMpower. The EMpower community—our team, Directors, supporters, grantee partners and young people—will continue to be united by a deep sense of connection, purpose and shared values. We will have stirred generational change, with young people leading the charge to tackle the day's challenges with vision, courage and determination. The coming decades will present multifold challenges that demand we remain adaptable, resilient, solution-oriented—all qualities that are core to our DNA. Whatever the future holds, we are confident in our collective ability to rise to the occasion, guided by integrity, inclusion, perseverance, driven by the belief that our purpose on earth is to improve the lives.

Cynthia Steele | EMpower President & CEO

