

# OUR VOICES ON PLANET

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**GLOBAL DIALOGUE AND LEARNING  
FOR DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**SHAPING.FUTURE.TOGETHER**  
Collaboration in international education partnerships for  
democracy and sustainability,  
Online Conference, May 8-9, 2025

A DOCUMENTATION BY  
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[www.learn2change-network.org](http://www.learn2change-network.org)

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# Conference Overview



The Online Conference May 2025 marked the continuation of a provocative international dialogue initiated in an earlier gathering. Organised by the Learn2Change Network, this second part built upon the connections, themes, and challenges explored previously; [\*see the part 1 of the Conference Documentation.\*](#)

With a focus on solidarity, decolonisation, and international educational partnerships, this two-day online gathering brought together educators, activists, researchers, and civil society members from Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America.

Participants engaged in thought-provoking keynotes, critical responses, reflective dialogues, and peer-driven exchanges to collectively deepen understanding and share strategies for more equitable cooperation across borders. The gathering created space to rethink solidarity, examine structural inequalities, and envision futures grounded in justice and mutual learning.



# Agenda at a Glance

## MAY 8, 2025

Time	Session Title	Speakers / Hosts
14:00–14:17	Warm Welcome and Orientation	Timo Holthoff, Sarah Laustroer
14:17–14:27	Introduction to Learn2Change and Recap of Part I	Sarah Laustroer, Maissara Saeed
14:27–14:30	Mindfulness Exercise	Timo Holthoff
14:30–14:45	Participant Activation: Breakout Session	Facilitated by Gabriele Janecki
14:45–14:55	Sharing Expectations via Mentimeter	Gabriele Janecki
14:55–15:00	Program Orientation	Timo Holthoff
15:00–15:20	Impulse: Rethinking Solidarity	Peter Emorinken-Donatus
15:30–15:35	Critical Response	Ruby Hembrom
15:35–15:55	Resonance Groups in Breakouts	All participants
15:55–16:25	Plenary Discussion	Moderated by Timo Holthoff
16:25–16:45	Cultural Break & Music	
16:45–16:55	Short Impulses on Solidarity Practices Across Diverse Networks	Eva Gloria Fernández Pérez, Steffen Emrich, Harris Thambo, Silvia Hesse, Sophie Eickhorst
16:55–17:25	Working Groups with Networks	Breakout Sessions
17:25–17:50	Plenary Sharing and Discussion	Julia Wältring, Gabriele Janecki, Geoffrey Nsubuka, Joseph Sakala
17:50–18:00	Musical Closing & Wrap-Up	

## MAY 9, 2025

Time	Session Title	Speakers / Hosts
14:00–14:10	Welcome Back and Wrap-Up of Day One	Timo Holthoff, Sabine Meyer, Gilbert Germain
14:10–14:30	Participant Reflections & Breakout Discussions	Facilitated by Sarah Laustroer
14:30–14:35	Orientation of Day Two	Timo Holthoff
14:35–14:50	Impulse: No Funds, No Future?	Ali Al-Nasani
14:50–14:55	Critical Response	Maissara Saeed
14:55–15:05	Q&A Session	All participants
15:05–15:15	Musical Break	
15:15–15:40	Impulses from Practice	Sarah Laustroer, Eva Gloria Fernández Pérez, Sophie Eickhorst, Ali Al-Nasani
15:40–16:15	Working Groups	Breakout Sessions
16:15–16:35	Plenary Sharing of Group Work	Julia Wältring, Joseph Sakala, Sabine Meyer, Ruby Hembrom
16:45–17:30	Panel Discussion: Bridging Opportunities and Challenges	Sigrun Landes, Clara Hörmann, Geoffrey Nsubuga, Gabriele Janecki, McArthur Matukuta
17:30–17:50	Evaluation and Participant Reflections	All participants
17:50–18:00	Musical Closing & Farewell	

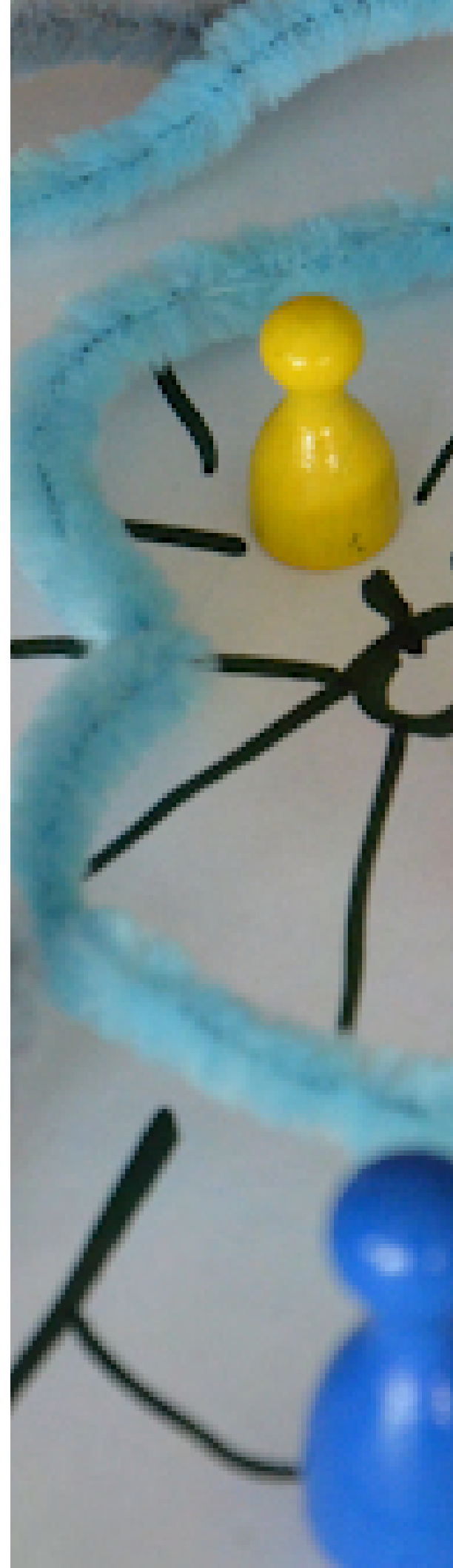
# DAY ONE SHORT SUMMARY

**The day opened with a warm welcome and grounding introduction by Timo Holthoff and the Learn2Change organizational team. With participants arriving from different continents, the orientation set a tone of reflection and connection, supported by a mindful breathing exercise.**

## **Key Themes and Highlights:**

- **Impulse: Rethinking Solidarity** Peter Emorinken-Donatus offered a powerful keynote on *postcolonial* perspectives in solidarity, calling attention to environmental justice and decolonial practices in international education partnerships.
- **Critical Response:** Ruby Hembrom responded with a deeply rooted reflection, questioning existing narratives and structures.
- **Dialogue and Reflection:** Participants explored the keynote themes in groups, discussing their personal reactions, questions, and shared insights.
- **Solidarity in Practice:** A session featuring four short impulses showcased diverse examples of solidarity in action:
  - *Eva Gloria Fernández Pérez* on trans-feminist theatre and resistance
  - *Steffen Emrich* on global ecovillage practices
  - *Silvia Hesse, Harris Thambo* on working together in partnership projects on fair trade and more
  - *Sophie Eickhorst* on peer leadership and youth empowerment
- **Working Groups and Plenary Breakout groups** dug deeper into the practicalities and challenges of meaningful solidarity within global networks, addressing colonial continuities and structural inequalities.

The day concluded with a plenary session to share insights and a musical closing that reaffirmed collective hope and resilience.



# WELCOMING AND OPENING

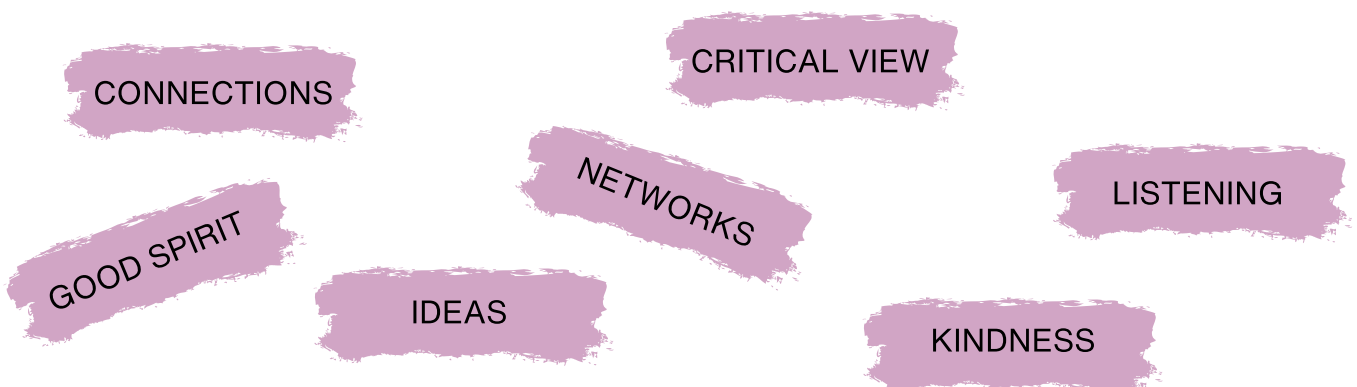
The conference opened with a warm welcome and a grounding introduction by moderator Timo Holthoff and the Learn2Change organising team. It became clear that the next two days would be about reconnection, reflection, inspiration, networking, and forming new alliances and visions for the future.

Timo Holthoff referred to a metaphor of stormy times, marked by growing political and economic tensions. Depending on where we live in the world, many of us are struggling to uphold and defend our activist work. While he reminded participants to stay aware of these storms and how they affect people differently, it was also an invitation to move closer together - to find moments of rest from the storm, and to regain strength in order to navigate it together.



With a few interactive questions, the aim was to give the team and the participants an overview of who is taking part in this conference. For example, who is present from which continent/country, who has already participated in the first conference and who has which background (e.g. formal education/teaching, academia/research, activism, social work).

Participants were also asked to share what they expect and can offer to enrich the conference...



# IMPULSE: RETHINKING SOLIDARITY



BY PETER EMORINKEN-DONATUS,

a freelance journalist, educational speaker, climate activist. He has been living in Germany for 30 years and won the taz Panter Award in 2022. Peter co-founded the Ecocide Law Alliance, campaigning for a criminalisation of the ecocide, as well as the BIPOC-Think Tank Care & Repair - Decolonial Think-Tank For Environmental Justice.



Colonialism is not over. Africa is not poor, Africa is exploited.



Who is really helping whom? If I destroy your house and then offer to help you rebuild it, is that solidarity or hypocrisy?



We have helped Europe so much. We built Europe. I'm waiting for someone to challenge that fact.

Peter argues that true global solidarity and meaningful ecological transformation require us to dismantle the legacies of colonialism, economic exploitation, environmental destruction, and educational injustice. He calls for a bold, justice-driven rethinking of development, partnership, and sustainability.

## I. Colonialism and the False Narrative of “Help”

Colonialism is not over - the term “post-colonial” is misleading.

The Global South, especially Africa, continues to be exploited, not helped.

“Who is helping whom?” - Africa has historically provided labor, resources, and sacrifice for Europe’s wealth and development.

Aid narratives obscure this imbalance and are often tools of continued control.



# IMPULSE: RETHINKING SOLIDARITY

PETER EMORINKEN-DONATUS

## II. Knowledge, Power, and Representation

Research and education are dominated by the Global North, where money and power set research agendas.

Quoting Prof. Kuma Ndube: *those with economic capital define what counts as knowledge.*

The educational system is deeply Eurocentric and needs to be decolonized.

## III. Forgotten Solidarity in World War II

African soldiers were crucial to Europe's liberation in World War II - many forced into service.

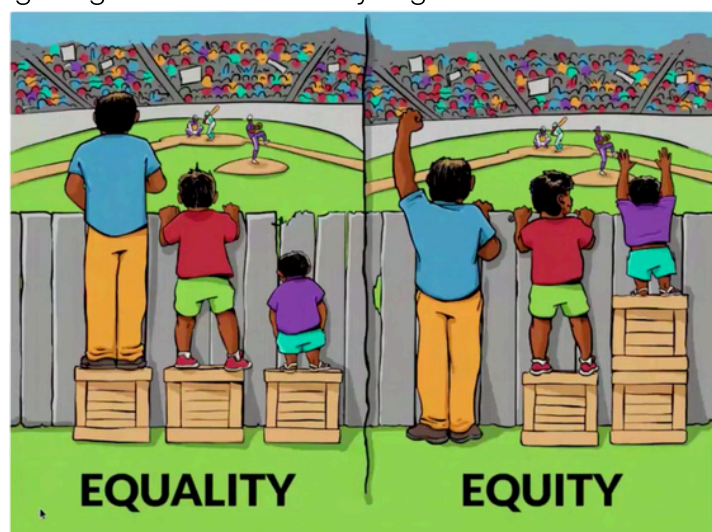
While May 8th is a holiday to remember the liberation from the Nazi regime in some parts of Germany and other European countries, it is a day of mourning in Algeria due to the massacre of Algerians demanding independence after the war.

After helping free Europe, Africa was betrayed, ignored, and re-subjugated - what the speaker calls "forgotten solidarity."

## IV. Climate Crisis and Forced Migration

Africa will be one of the regions worst hit by climate change, with unlivable heat predicted by the end of the century. The West's historical emissions are driving this - yet African migrants are painted as burdens or economic threats.

The climate crisis risks triggering the largest genocide in history if global inaction continues.





## V. The Way Forward: Socio-Ecological Transformation

### Core Pillars of Change:

#### 1. **Global, Equitable Partnerships**

- Africans cannot solve global problems alone - we need fair cooperation.
- Real partnership must include admitting past wrongs and issuing official apologies (from both governments and corporations like Shell).

#### 2. **Reparations and Restitution**

This includes:

- **Financial compensation**
  - **Environmental cleanup** in places like the Niger Delta and Congo.
  - **Return of land** to Indigenous peoples.
  - **Return of cultural artefacts.**
- #### 3. **Legal Reform: Make Ecocide a Crime**
- Destruction of the environment must be criminalized like war crimes.
  - Ecocide should become the fifth crime against peace at the International Criminal Court.

#### 4. **Protect Indigenous Knowledge and Rights**

- Indigenous peoples protect 80% of global biodiversity.
- Their knowledge and land must be respected and protected.
- No more patents on Indigenous intellectual property - ban knowledge theft.

#### 5. **Economic Justice**

- Introduce global unconditional income.
- Tackle capitalization of life's essentials - water, food, health.
- Move beyond growth-centered capitalism toward a just, sustainable economy.

#### 6. **Transform Education**

- Decolonize curriculum globally.
- Center diverse, indigenous, and historically excluded knowledge systems.

### Conclusion:

Peter ends by emphasizing that we are at a critical moment in human history. Facing climate catastrophe, systemic inequality, and moral hypocrisy, we must act boldly.

That means:

1. **Naming exploitation for what it is,**
2. **Restoring justice for the oppressed and dispossessed,**
3. **And building a world based on genuine solidarity, sustainability, and equity - not charity or guilt.**

*We don't just need your help. We need your honesty. We need your accountability. And we need transformation.*

# CRITICAL RESPONSE



BY RUBY HEMBROM,

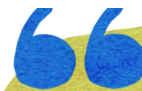
an Adivasi cultural documentarian and founder of *adivaani*, a non-profit archiving and publishing platform by and for Adivasis. Her work centers on reclaiming Adivasi presence in historical, cultural, and literary spaces, alongside active advocacy and movement-building. She is currently a PhD candidate in Social Policy at the London School of Economics.



Solidarity is the cement that keeps a diverse and deeply divided society together.



The right time for solidarity? The moment for it is always now.



Solidarity at times feels sterile when we think we don't have the power to change things, when we think we can't make a difference.

**Ruby** builds on Peter's decolonial perspective by emphasizing solidarity as a foundational human value. She argues that solidarity is not neutral - it is an act of taking sides, and demands courage, compassion, and defiance. Solidarity helps hold together diverse, divided societies, and when absent, leads to fragmentation and tyranny. She acknowledges that solidarity may feel ineffective or sterile at times, especially in the face of overwhelming power structures. Yet, historical examples - like the forgotten role of Algerians in liberating France remind us that collective acts of solidarity have power.

The message concludes with a clear call: **the time for solidarity is always now.**

# SOLIDARITY IN PRACTICE



## SOPHIE EICKHORST, PEER LEADER INTERNATIONAL

### Overview:

Peer Leader International is a Germany-based civil society network operating globally, with deep roots in participatory, youth-centered, and sustainability-focused work. Active in countries like Brazil, South Africa, Uganda, Bosnia, and more, their work centers on shaping the future of youth through equitable, innovative collaboration.

### Key Approaches:

- *Participatory and Inclusive:* Everyone, regardless of background, contributes ideas.
- *Sustainability-Focused:* Guided by the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- *Action-Oriented and Political:* Engages directly with decision-makers without partisan ties.
- *Global Partnerships:* Not charity-driven, but based on reciprocal learning and mutual respect.
- *Core Value:* "Solidarity as a spirit, not as aid."

*We want to learn in partnerships, not through development aid - learning from each other, not about each other.*



## EVA-GLORIA FERNANDEZ-PEREZ, MA(G)DALENA INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

### Overview:

This international trans-feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial network unites practitioners of the Feminist Theatre of the Oppressed. Rooted in Barbara Santos' methodology, it operates across South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

### Key Approaches:

- *Art as Resistance:* Uses feminist theater to expose and confront structural injustices.
- *Shared Learning:* Members exchange knowledge and support across regions and continents.
- *Solidarity Across Borders:* Finds common ground in shared experiences of patriarchy and colonialism.
- *Healing Through Aesthetics:* Theater creates compassion and understanding across divides.

*The patriarchal structure is the same, no matter your continent, culture, or skin color, and this is what brings us together.*

# SOLIDARITY IN PRACTICE



## SILVIA HESSE, HARRIS THAMBO, FREUNDESKREIS MALAWI - AWARE AND FAIR

### Overview:

This Germany–Malawi friendship network has roots in post-colonial solidarity dating back 60+ years. Originally formed to support Malawi's independence, it has evolved into a broad city-to-city and civil society partnership promoting justice and sustainable consumption.

### Key Approaches:

- *Long-Term North–South Partnership*: Based on respect, mutual trust, and shared decision-making.
- *Grassroots Dialogue*: Engages communities through volunteering, events, and collective learning.
- *Global Justice*: Includes indigenous rights and sustainable consumption efforts (e.g. with Colombian indigenous groups).
- *Solidarity in Practice*: Focuses on listening, co-creating, and building mutual support systems.

*Solidarity means creating spaces for dialogue - not pushing expectations, but finding common ground.*



## STEFFEN EMRICH, GLOBAL ECOVILLAGE NETWORK (GEN)

### Overview:

GEN is a worldwide network of intentional communities and traditional villages. It connects people across continents through shared knowledge, ecological living, and mutual aid - exemplified by its rapid response to the Ukraine crisis.

### Key Approaches:

- *Social Cohesion as a Foundation*: Strong relationships enable fast, decentralized action (e.g. refugee sheltering).
- *Solidarity in Climate & Human Rights*: Includes political advocacy, resource sharing, and climate education.
- *Sociocratic Decision-Making*: Ensures that power is shared, not dictated by wealth or geography.
- *Empowerment Without Paternalism*: Promotes cooperation at eye-level.

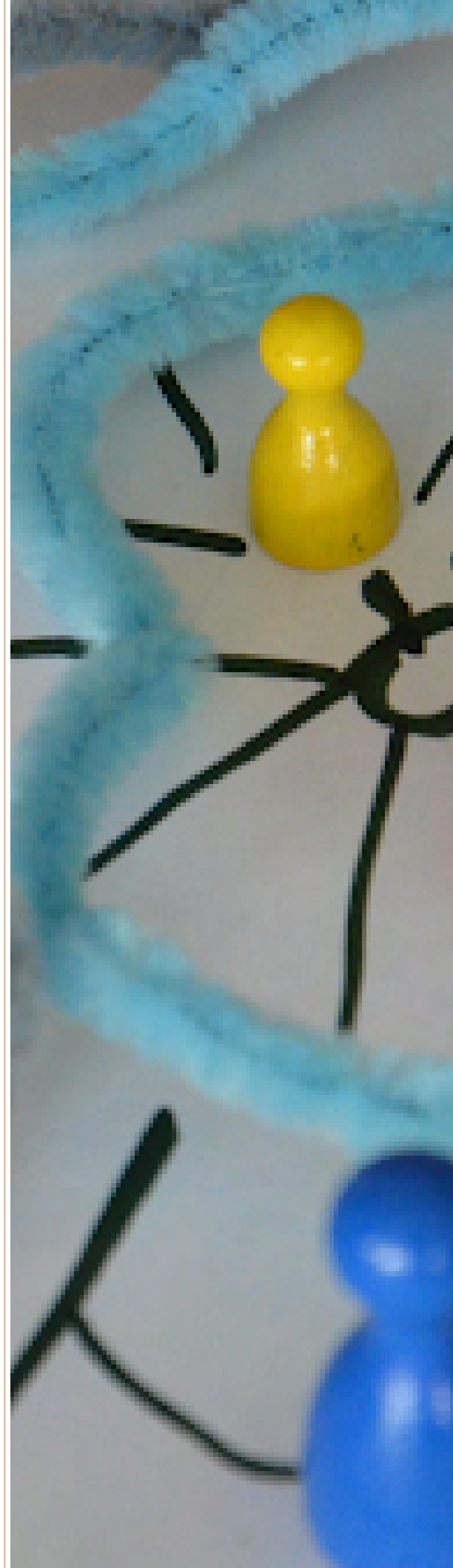
*Solidarity isn't just about material support - it's about how we share power and make decisions together.*

# DAY TWO SHORT SUMMARY

The second day began with a reflective welcome and summary of Day One. Participants shared their thoughts in breakout groups, reconnecting with the previous day's themes and preparing for the deep discussions ahead.

## Key Themes and Highlights:

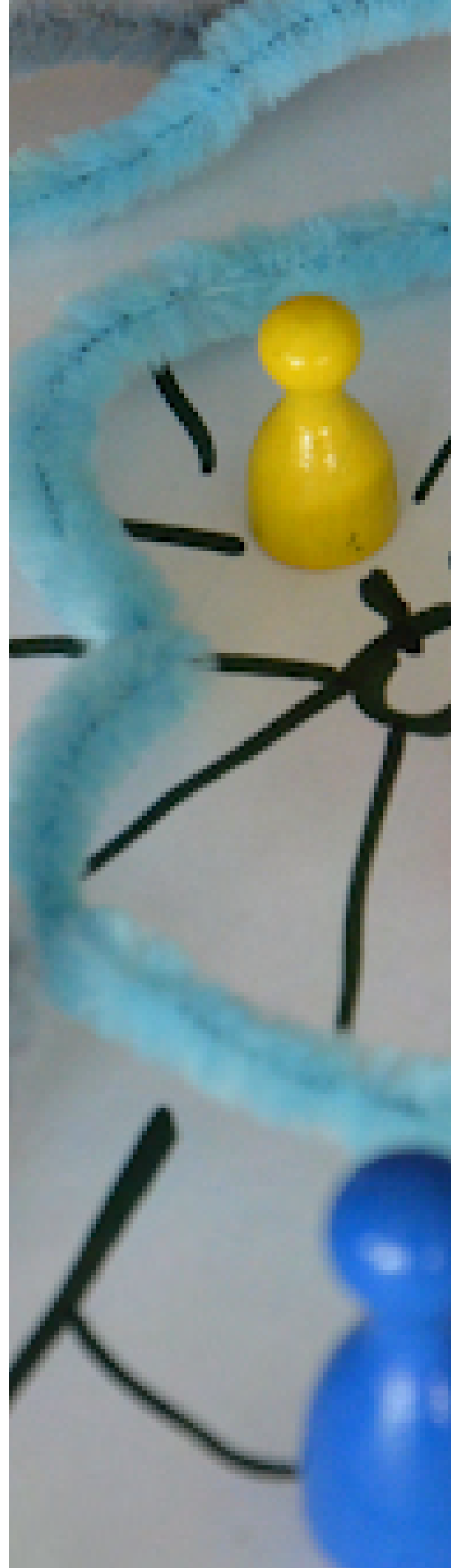
- **No Funds, No Future?** Ali Al-Nasani initiated the day with an insightful impulse talk addressing the structural challenges and opportunities in funding international educational partnerships, with a clear call for decolonial approaches and sustainability.
- **Critical Response:** Maissara Saeed responded with a nuanced reflection grounded in his experience with Umbaja e.V. and Learn2Change, emphasizing the lived realities of global South partners.
- **Impulses from Practice:** Four short presentations provided practical insights from ongoing projects:
  - Sarah Laustroer – VNB / Learn2Change
  - Eva Gloria Fernández Pérez – Mag(d)alena Network
  - Sophie Eickhorst – Peer Leader International
  - Ali Al-Nasani – EIRENE
- **Breakout Discussions:** Participants gathered in small groups to explore real-world funding challenges, such as dependency, access barriers, and political shifts. They also discussed strategies that had proven successful.
- **Panel Discussion - Bridging Opportunities and Challenges:** The day ended in a dynamic and at times heated panel discussion that brought together funders and practitioners.





# DAY TWO SHORT SUMMARY

- Key participants included:
  - **Sigrun Landes from Brot für die Welt**, a Protestant development service committed to supporting equitable North-South partnerships.
  - **Clara Hörmann from African-German Youth Office / Engagement Global**, focused on inclusive youth engagement and global cooperation.
  - **Geoffrey Nsubuga, representing Somero Uganda**, who spoke on grassroots realities in accessing international funding.
  - **Gabriele Janecki from VNB / Learn2Change Network**, offering insights into bridging donor systems and international grassroots efforts.
  - **McArthur Matukuta, leader at Solomonian Peacocks Theatre**, who gave testimony to the political complexities of current international funding conditions.
- A closing round of reflections highlighted the urgency for more transparent, inclusive, and context-aware funding models.
- **Farewell and Reflections** The final session invited participants to share personal takeaways, express gratitude, and envision next steps for continued collaboration. The conference closed with a musical farewell and symbolic gesture of hope.





# DAY 2 - WELCOMING

Sabine Meyer (Learn2Change member) started the day with a short summary of the previous day and a guided meditation.

This was followed by a contribution from Gilbert Germain (Learn2Change member), in which he addressed the following questions:

- What can we do to create justice?
- How can we add solidarity and democracy into this or any other platform?
- How can we manage to implement our visions and values to a better future?

He concluded his contribution by reminding us that every person needs leadership skills to build a future for ourselves and for vulnerable people. A future we can rely on, where we can share stories and learn from each other. The Learn2Change Network serves as motivation to continue this work and to thrive, and the platform offers a great opportunity to do so.

The Program continued with an interactive task in small groups...



In the concluding plenary session, participants had the opportunity to share further reflections. Malin Veenhuis-Memela and Gabriele Janecki offered personal insights. Building on the previous day's discussion, some key questions emerged: How does solidarity relate to the privileges we hold, and how do these privileges shape our individual understanding of solidarity? As well as how our living conditions influence our capacity to express and practice solidarity, and how networks and organisations can responsibly leverage their own privileges to encourage and sustain it.

# IMPULSE: NO FUNDS, NO FUTURE?



BY ALI AL-NASANI,

a dedicated human rights activist with broad experience in international advocacy and peacebuilding. His work has focused on refugees, women's rights, minority protection, and justice. Committed to grassroots peace efforts and promoting diversity, he is also recognized for advancing anti-racism and decolonization within organizations. Now appointed to lead EIRENE in its mission for peace and human rights.



Western knowledge is prioritized while indigenous solutions are sidelined - this reinforces the very neo-colonial structures we claim to be dismantling.



Even when local actors are included, they are often involved symbolically rather than meaningfully. That is tokenism, not transformation.



Short-term project funding creates pressure to show quick results - but real change, especially through education, takes time.

The talk focuses on financing international partnerships, highlighting funding opportunities and structures, key challenges and power dynamics, decolonial perspectives and reforms.

Eirene peace network - funding model  
three pillars of funding:

- volunteer programs - funded by the German government, Protestant church, private donations
  - civil peace programs - fully funded by the German government
  - migrant projects ("great neighbours") - funded by the European Union
- other sources include; membership fees and donations (e.g. Eirene foundation)

# IMPULSE: NO FUNDS, NO FUTURE?

BY ALI AL-NASANI

## **Structural Imbalances in Global Funding**

*Where the money is:*

- controlled by international institutions: World Bank, IMF, UNDP
- bilateral aid (e.g. GIZ) rarely reaches local organisations directly

*Who gets the money:*

- large INGOs, elite firms in the global north dominate funding streams

*Local Exclusion:*

- small, local NGOs rarely receive direct funding
- dependence on global north intermediaries limits agency

## **Why It Matters (Decolonial Perspective)**

- **funding = power:** Those who fund also set priorities.
- **Local agency is restricted** when donors impose externally designed agendas.
- **Western knowledge systems are prioritized**, sidelining indigenous and local expertise.
- This sustains **neo-colonial dynamics**, where the north “develops” the south.

## **Structural Barriers**

- **Tokenism** often replaces true inclusion.
- **Gatekeeping** through complex compliance requirements excludes grassroots actors.
- Applications and reports (e.g. for german development aid) must be in **german**, disadvantaging non-german-speaking partners.
- **Short-term funding cycles** undermine long-term change, especially in education.

## **Unequal Accountability**

- Local actors are held to strict reporting standards.
- **Donors, however, are rarely accountable** for delays, broken promises, or inequitable practices.

## **Currency Volatility**

- Donor funding rarely accounts for inflation and exchange rate shifts, placing the risk on local partners.

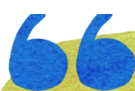
*When the global north controls funding, they also control the agenda. That's not partnership - it's power.*

# CRITICAL RESPONSE



BY MAISSARA SAEED,

born in Omdurman, Sudan. After working as a medical scientist in hospitals and universities, he fled to Germany in 2010. He is a political activist since the early 1990s and has continued this involvement in Germany. He is a co-founder of Umbaja e.V., a German Sudanese association for migration, democracy and development in Hannover, Germany.



Funders often work with outdated assumptions. They don't always know the current realities of the communities they're funding.



If you only fund those already in your network, you are not building inclusion - you are reinforcing exclusion.



We don't need capacity building, we need capacity sharing. We already have knowledge. What we lack is access.

**Maissara** responds to the funding analysis with a grounded critique from the perspective of a Sudanese-German educator and grassroots organizer. Building on the decolonial critique of power asymmetries in global funding, he highlights how many funders remain disconnected from the ground realities of the very communities they claim to serve. Funding structures, he argues, are often built on outdated assumptions, lacking input from those living the daily consequences of injustice, migration, and marginalization. He challenges the widespread narrative of “capacity building,” arguing instead for **capacity sharing** - a model that recognizes that grassroots groups already have deep expertise, and that the real gap lies not in knowledge, but in access, trust, and resources. Maissara calls attention to the gatekeeping nature of donor networks, where only those already in the circle of trust can access funding, while newer, community-rooted initiatives are routinely excluded.

Bureaucracy, he warns, is not just inconvenient - it is often a barrier to survival. For small groups working with displaced people or organizing under precarious conditions, the rigid demands of institutional funders often undermine their ability to respond effectively, creatively, or urgently. Innovation is suffocated by systems designed to control risk rather than support change.

Despite these critiques, his message is not one of despair but of transformation. He urges funders and institutions to reimagine relationships with civil society - not as one-way investments, but as shared journeys of learning, redistribution, and trust-building.

His call is clear: **decentralize power, simplify access, and stop reinforcing exclusion under the banner of inclusion.**



# FUNDING PRACTICES ACROSS DIVERSE NETWORKS

Representatives from Learn2Change, Peer Leader International, Red Ma(g)dalena, and EIRENE shared experiences and challenges of sustaining transnational networks under current funding structures. They highlighted the everyday realities, inequalities, and resilience behind funding international partnerships.



## SARAH LAUSTROER, VNB/LEARN2CHANGE

### How They Work

- Funded primarily through short-term project grants (e.g. German BMZ and church funding)
- No core or structural funding for the network itself
- Coordination based in Germany (2 salaried roles), partners' contributions often voluntary and activity-linked

### Challenges

- Funding structures enforce imbalances in power and access
- Attempts to decentralize coordination (rotating or regional offices) remain unfunded dreams
- Limited flexibility: had to choose between Global South partnerships vs European collaboration due to restrictive funding programs
- Regular challenges in financing equitable participation, such as:
  - Visa-related travel within partner countries
  - Access to stable internet



## EVA-GLORIA FERNÁNDEZ PÉREZ, MAG(D)ALENA NETWORK

### How They Work

- Entirely unfunded as a network - operate through solidarity-based mutual support
- Each local group maintains a *Caja de Resistencia* (resistance fund) - shared when collective needs arise
- Have self-organized five international festivals (South America, Africa, Europe)
- Pandemic-era online festival helped broaden access but also highlighted digital inequality

## Challenges

- Constant financial uncertainty despite high impact
- Reliant on passion and political commitment, but energy can drain under sustained underfunding
- Ongoing need: a sustainable financial strategy that reflects feminist and decolonial values while reducing structural inequality



## SOPHIE EICKHORST, PEER LEADER INTERNATIONAL

### How they work

- Operate on a project-by-project basis - up to 30 projects/year funded by ministries, foundations, lotteries.
- Funding is often unpredictable, short-term (1–2 years), and restricted by funder preferences.
- Despite financial constraints, they value the freedom to design meaningful projects - even if sustainability is hard to achieve.

### Challenges

- Insecure funding for Global South partners: e.g., recent promising project with South Africa collapsed when the German funder withdrew.
- Lack of long-term funding means it's difficult to build durable infrastructure or repeat effective programs.
- Constant need to invent “new” projects even when past ones worked well.



## ALI AL-NASANI, EIRENE INTERNATIONAL

### How they work

- Projects are funded by German public sources (BMZ) and implemented in long-term partnerships.
- Partners are included from the conceptual stage to final reporting.
- EIRENE acts as an advocate and bridge: voicing partner concerns and creating platforms in Germany for Southern partners to be heard.

### Challenges

- Power sharing is a balancing act: some partners may not want full financial/legal responsibility.
- German legal structures (e.g., BMZ rules) restrict flexibility.
- There's an internal push to create collective decision-making across partner organizations, though concerns of competition remain.
- The board remains legally accountable, limiting how much decision-making can be shifted.

*They emphasised the importance of trust-based partnerships and voiced a hope to include partners more meaningfully in decisions about project design and resource allocation.*



# GROUP WORK FUNDING PRACTICES

Using a FLINGA Board (an interactive digital whiteboard) participants were sent in breakout sessions and asked to share their experiences by answering the following questions:

- ❓ Where does your main funding come from and how does that influence your work or partnerships?
  
- ❓ What are the biggest funding challenges - both practical and political (e.g. USAID, BMZ, global power dynamics)?
  
- ❓ How have you dealt with these challenges - strategies and approaches?
  
- ❓ Do you have a success story or key insight to share - something that worked well or a lesson learned?

The results are presented on the next page.



# PANEL DISCUSSION

## FUNDING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS: BRIDGING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES – A DIALOGUE BETWEEN DONORS AND PRACTITIONERS

The closing session of Our Voices, Our Planet was charged, honest, and deeply necessary. Activists and funders confronted one another with hard truths, open questions, and real frustration about what partnership means when power is uneven.

Clara Hörmann (AGYO/ Engagement Global) and Sigrun Landes (Bread for the World) were present from the donor organizations and the perspective from civil society organisations were represented by Geoffrey Nsubuga (Somero Uganda), Gabi Janecki (VNB e.V. /Learn2Change Network) and McArthur Matukuta (Solomonic Peacocks Theatre).

*In the following, quotes from the panelist are shown in blue and from the audience in orange.*



### **Geoffrey Nsubuga (Somero, Uganda):**

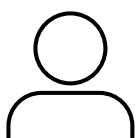
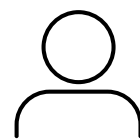
The biggest challenge is about the bureaucracy... it makes us feel dependent. We need flexible funding that lets us stay relevant to our community - not just follow the donor's agenda.

We are in a key position because we can lobby our interests with the ministry, whereas our partner organizations don't have this ability.

### **Gabriele Janecki (VNB / Learn2Change, Germany):**

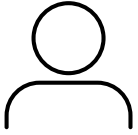
Our network became sustainable because at the beginning, we had time and space to build trust. Now, it's hard to find funding for that kind of open-ended meeting.

There is funding for projects in Germany or in the Global South, but rarely for both. So we miss out on local trainings, or coordination roles outside Germany.



### **McArthur Matukuta (Solomonic Peacocks Theatre, Malawi):**

Most funding is activity-based. But you can't run an activity if your operations are not working. It should be operational-based - that's where we are failing.



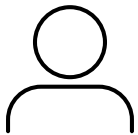
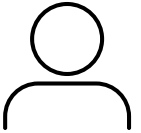
**Maissara Saeed (Umbaya, Sudan/Germany):**

The logic is still too much about capacity building. What we actually need is capacity sharing. We already have knowledge.

**Clara Hörmann (AGYO - African-German-Youth-Office/ Engagement Global, Germany):**

We're not the donors. We're the intermediaries. But we're trying: we now do two-step applications, translated documents, and training modules where partners can be invited.

The ministries follow political decision-making. That's why civil society organizing is so important - you need to build pressure.



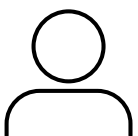
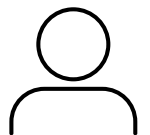
**Sigrun Landes (Bread for the World, Germany)**

We can't support flights into Germany any longer... That was a decision made after internal debate about climate change.

Still, if you have a new project idea, please talk to us. I can't promise anything, but I've seen the impossible happen before.

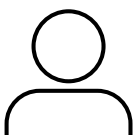
**Marion Rolle (Member of Learn2Change, / VNB e.V., Germany):**

We don't need less international connection - we need more. Without face-to-face exchange, how can we develop strategies and build trust across countries?



**Joseph Sakala (Member of Learn2Change, Malawi):**

Sometimes small organisations lose funding opportunities just because they can't afford an audit. That shouldn't be the reason.



**Geoffrey Nsubuga (Somero, Uganda):**

Imagine a tree growing in dry, barren land. It has deep roots, strong branches, and potential to bear fruits that could feed the whole community. But the vision gets lost when financial power dictates our direction.

We call on donors to trust our mission - not distort it.

# THE END ...

The conversation did not resolve every challenge, but it did what solidarity requires:

It made space for the truth. Bureaucracy, short-term funding, and donor-driven agendas were named directly. Funders, in turn, acknowledged limitations and invited continued dialogue.

## Acknowledgments

The exchange and the entire conference dialogue was made possible through every participant.

**The conference was organised** by Verein Niedersächsischer Bildungsinitiativen VNB e. V. and Learn2Change – Global Network of Educational Activists, in the frame of the project “OUR VOICES OUR PLANET II”



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**Engagement Global on behalf of**



# ADDITION

During breaks participants could take part in a small musical journey by listening to a song from across the world.



- Kenyan DJ Blinky Bill OH WAH (feat. NATURE)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hjn4MWsL\\_to](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hjn4MWsL_to))
- Tiken Jah Fakoly – iconic Reggae musician from Ivory Coast  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFoThCFID3c>
- Hasta la Raíz | Song by mexican artist Natalia Lafourcade, interpreted by musicians across Latin America (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUaKBGnn2DQ>)
- Danish singer song writer Tina Dico with her partner Helgi Jonsson, featuring Ina Müller - “No time to sleep” of a song of change  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_kAP66knlaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kAP66knlaM))
- Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo'ole 1990 Hawaii - “Somewhere over the Rainbow”  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1bFr2SWP1I>)

