22nd Investors Group Meeting

CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE GFF

BRINGING COMMUNITY VOICES INTO HEALTH FINANCING, POLICY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

OBJECTIVES

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and youth-led organizations (YLOs) are a critical part of the partnership model of the Global Financing Facility (GFF). Community knowledge, grassroots accountability, and youth-led innovation translate financing commitments into better health and nutrition outcomes for women, children, and adolescents. CSOs and YLOs have been central to the GFF's work since its inception — and the GFF's TRANSFORM 2030 strategy continues to reflect this conviction, embedding CSOs and YLOs in GFF governance and programming.

This note reviews progress on the new GFF engagement architecture and the milestones reached since the last update in 2024 across its three components: (1) the GFF x CIVIC Partnership; (2) complementary CSO/YLO engagement at country level; and (3) renewed leadership of the Civil Society Coordinating Group (CSCG) and the Global Youth Platform (GYP). With the first cohort of grants to be launched by end of year, evidence of results is not yet available and figures reported here are intended to illustrate progress in establishing the initiative and laying the foundations for implementation and future impact. The GFF Secretariat is seeking the GFF's Investors Group (IG) guidance on how to sustain and increase this momentum as the renewed engagement moves into full implementation under TRANSFORM 2030.

Background

The GFF has engaged with CSOs and YLOs since its inception, recognizing that community knowledge, advocacy, and accountability are irreplaceable ingredients for sustainable health system change. Civil society and youth serve as members of

the GFF IG, ensuring that community perspectives inform and shape the GFF's strategic direction, accountability, and leadership. Over the years, the partnership has deepened and scaled up its support for civic engagement with a focus on maximizing impact at both country and global levels, around a set of concrete solutions, including grants programs, joint learning and capacity building, and coordination.

Between 2022 and 2024, the GFF NGO Host Project awarded US$2.7 million in grants to 51 CSOs and YLOs in 28 countries through 12-month grant cycles. Across countries, grantees supported Investment Case processes, advanced policy and budget advocacy for RMNCAH-N, strengthened government accountability mechanisms, and built coalitions that amplified civil society and youth voices in health-sector decision-making. These grants helped demonstrate that relatively small, targeted investments can generate meaningful policy engagement and coalition-building outcomes, while also underscoring the importance of longer-term, flexible support to address sustainability challenges and preserve civil society influence in increasingly constrained operating environments.[1]

At the IG19 meeting (Abuja, November 2024), the IG and the GFF Trust Fund Committee (TFC) endorsed a plan to further strengthen this engagement for the 2026–2030 strategy period. A taskforce on civil society and youth engagement reviewed and updated the GFF–CSO engagement framework and presented a set of recommendations grounded in lessons learned from the previous strategy period. These recommendations included: strengthening the enabling environment for CSO and youth representation; providing larger size grants to allow deepening engagement — including a trade-off to go deeper with more resources rather than spreading resources too thin across more countries; and offering differentiated technical assistance tailored to local contexts. Recommendations also included longer grant periods and bringing grantees closer to World Bank/GFF co-financed projects.

Based on this advice, the TFC approved a new allocation of US$18 million for civil society and youth engagement, to be used to provide grants for local CSO and YLO coalition strengthening, advocacy and accountability activities in partner countries, support scaling-up of community-led solutions, and coordination of the GFF global civil society and youth constituencies.

[1] PAI, *Global Financing Facility: Evidence Briefs* (2025)

The GFF TRANSFORM 2030 strategy, developed in 2025, reflected these recommendations as well with the strategy underscoring the need to maintain structured partnerships with CSO and YLO partners to increase meaningful engagement[2] on critical health and nutrition decisions at country and global levels.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Civil Society and Youth Engagement in the Global Health Landscape

Across many GFF partner countries, civic space remains under pressure, with legal restrictions, shrinking civic freedoms, funding constraints, and political dynamics limiting opportunities for civil society participation in governance, accountability, and policy processes.[3] The 2026 State of Civil Society Report and findings from the CIVICUS Monitor document a global trend of increasing restrictions on civic action and participation, while also highlighting the critical role civil society continues to play in defending accountability, inclusion, and public participation.

These challenges are unfolding against a backdrop of significant shifts in the global health and development landscape.[4] Declining official development assistance (ODA), evolving donor priorities, and ongoing debates about the future of the global health architecture are highlighting the importance of domestic resource mobilization, country ownership, and accountability for results. OECD projections indicate that health ODA could decline by 29 percent to 46 percent% between 2024 and 2026,[5] representing the steepest reductions across major development sectors. At the same time, initiatives such as the HEAR CSO process and broader discussions on global health reform have called for more equitable, participatory, and community-driven approaches to health governance and financing.

Evidence from recent civil society consultations and surveys points to a common reality: many community-rooted organizations are facing significant challenges to

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In this paper, "meaningful engagement" refers to the inclusive, sustained, and influential participation of civil society and youth-led organizations throughout planning, implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes. It includes timely access to information, opportunities to contribute to decision-making, adequate capacity and resources to participate, and clear evidence that their perspectives help shape priorities, Investment Cases, policies, and financing decisions.

[3] CIVICUS. *State of Civil Society Report 2026*; CIVICUS Monitor, *People Power Under Attack*.

[4] HEAR CSO, *A House Built Together, Fit for All (2026)*;

[5] OECD. *ODA Projections for 2026 and the Near-Term*. Development Co-operation Directorate, June 2026

sustain their operations, yet remain indispensable partners in driving accountability, amplifying community perspectives, and ensuring that health financing reaches those most in need. The PAI/IBP/COPASAH State of Civil Society Working in Global Health in 2026 report, drawing on responses from 461 organizations across 73 countries, found that civil society organizations are facing mounting pressures from declining funding, narrowing civic space, and growing expectations to support country-led health and development processes. Nearly 90% of respondents reported reduced ability to monitor services or engage in advocacy, underscoring a widening gap between the responsibilities entrusted to civil society and the resources and operating space available to fulfill them.[6] These findings call for engagement models that move beyond short-term projects and place greater emphasis on sustainability, partnership, and meaningful participation.

Key Lessons Shaping a New Approach with CSO and YLO Partners

The GFF's experience aligns with broader evidence and recent analyses of civil society and youth engagement in an evolving global health architecture. It underscores the importance of community voice, accountability, and locally led action as countries and global health institutions adapt to declining aid flows, changing financing patterns, and reforms to global health governance.

First, meaningful engagement requires sustained and flexible funding. Experience from previous grant mechanisms highlighted the limitations of short funding cycles and administrative burdens. Consultations with civil society and youth partners, together with analyses from the Wemos, point to the need for predictable, flexible, and sufficiently long-term support that enables CSOs and YLOs to engage consistently in advocacy, accountability, community monitoring, and policy dialogue processes.[7] This lesson is reflected in the funding model endorsed at IG19. The current GFF x CIVIC grants offer 18 months of support at an expected US$150,000–210,000 each. That is a significant increase in grant size and a longer duration than before, with technical assistance delivered through a new platform. The aim is a stronger foundation for sustained engagement.

Second, financing alone is insufficient without an enabling environment and tailored support. Evidence from CIVICUS highlights the challenges created by

[6] PAI, IBP & COPASAH. *State of Civil Society Working in Global Health in 2026.*
[7] WEMOS. *Civil Society and Domestic Resource Mobilization Policy Brief Series (2023-2025)*

shrinking civic space, while GFF consultations identified growing demand for technical assistance, capacity strengthening, peer learning, and coalition building. The new GFF CSO and youth architecture therefore combines financing with tailored **support to strengthen both organizational capacity and influence.**

Third, global advocacy and country-level action must reinforce one another. Recent analyses from the GFF, the HEAR CSO Process, the Kinaura Global Health Architecture Report, and the UHC2030 State of UHC Commitment series point to a common conclusion: community priorities, country-level engagement, and global accountability mechanisms are most effective when they reinforce one another.[8] The new GFF engagement architecture combines global constituency support, knowledge exchange, and advocacy with stronger engagement in country-level GFF processes.

Lastly, collaboration is essential for impact. Effective engagement depends on stronger coordination among CSOs and YLOs (including through strengthening coalitions), governments, GFF country team leads and coordinators, World Bank country teams, and other partners. Strengthening these relationships and creating accessible pathways for participation are therefore central features of the new engagement architecture.

PROGRESS TO DATE

GFF x CIVIC: Empowering CSOs & YLOs in GFF Partner Countries

The most significant structural development in the past year has been the operationalization of the GFF x CIVIC partnership, a joint initiative between the GFF and CIVIC: The Civil Society and Social Innovation Alliance within the World Bank.

Following an open and highly competitive call for proposals launched in July 2025 (with almost 300 applications received at expression-of-interest stage), two consortia were competitively selected in December 2025 to lead the platform's work across 26 GFF partner countries, and organized around two complementary pillars:

[8] HEAR CSO *Synthesis Report* (2026); Kinaura Partners, *The Present and Future of the Global Health Architecture* (2026); UHC2030, *State of UHC Commitment series.*

- **Pillar 1 — VOICES: Strengthening civil society engagement and community voice for domestic resource mobilization**, led by **PATH, the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), and the Organization of African Youth (OAY)** works to strengthen civil society and youth leadership to advance domestic resource mobilization for women's, children's, and adolescent health and nutrition. Through grants to local CSOs and YLOs, capacity strengthening, structured policy dialogue, and accountability mechanisms, VOICES supports civil society and youth organizations to influence financing decisions and shape health system priorities across **22 eligible countries — Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe**. A call for proposals for subgrantees was launched on September 15, 2026, drawing over 1000 online participants. The opportunities for CSOs and YLOs under VOICES are substantial: rganizations will be able to access subgrants for advocacy and accountability work; receive tailored technical assistance on domestic resource mobilization, budget tracking, and health financing advocacy; and engage in structured policy dialogue with governments and GFF country teams, building the evidence base and relationships needed to influence country-level health financing decisions over the long term. The consortium received more than 821 eligible proposals from applicant partner organizations, and at least 22 subgrantees agreements are expected to be signed by end of 2026 (with an average amount per subgrantee of US$150,000[9]).

- **Pillar 2 — ALIGN: Scaling community-led solutions for adolescent health and nutrition** led by **Action Against Hunger (ACF), the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN), and The Youth Café (TCY)** works to scale and institutionalize community-led innovations to strengthen adolescent health and nutrition outcomes across **12 eligible countries — Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe**. ALIGN will enable CSOs and YLOs to participate meaningfully in the design, evaluation, financing, and policy integration of effective adolescent health programs, driving sustainability and systems change. Key areas of focus include policy and systems integration, evidence and impact, scaling proven solutions — such as HPV vaccination outreach, school health clubs, and mobile sexual and reproductive and health (SRH) initiatives

[9] A higher ceiling of US$175,000 is available for localized (state/county-level) engagement in Nigeria and Kenya.

— and regional communities of practice. For YLOs in particular, ALIGN offers a meaningful entry point into country level health system processes: it creates pathways for youth-led organizations to co-design solutions, generate evidence, and engage with governments and World Bank teams on the integration of adolescent health priorities into country health plans and GFF-supported operations. A call for proposals for subgrantees was published on October 6, 2026, with over 1,000 CSO and YLO representatives attending the launch event. The consortium received more than 246 proposals from applicant partner organizations, and at least 12 subgrantees agreements are expected to be signed by end of 2026 (with an average amount per subgrantee of US$210,000). Both consortia are expected to select subgrantees for an 18-month period of support, awarding one subgrant to a partnership consortium (with at least one YLO part of the local consortium) per eligible country under each pillar. Together, these two pillars represent a coherent and ambitious architecture for CSO and YLO engagement, moving from global constituency support to a portfolio of opportunities to influence country-level health financing, participate in community-led innovations and GFF processes. The two pillars will work in close coordination with the CSCG and GYP at global level, so that country-level evidence and experience can inform global discussions and global priorities can be brought back to country platforms. Engagement will be built into existing government-led processes, including where relevant World Bank Group Country Partnership Frameworks and National Health Compacts, rather than creating duplicate consultation tracks.

Table 1 details the key shifts in how the GFF engages with its CSO and YLO partners,

Table 1. Overview: GFF previous and new engagement models

Dimension	Previous engagement model (2022–2024)	TRANSFORM 2030 engagement architecture	Key shift
Governance	CSO and YLO engagement was coordinated through the Civil Society Coordinating Group (CSCG) and the Global Youth Platform (GYP), with representation on the Investors Group and participation in GFF consultations and governance processes.	CSCG and GYP leadership was renewed from 2024 to 2026, with **21 new representatives**, strengthening **gender balance**, **representation across all GFF regions**, and **English/French bilingual engagement**. Civil society and youth partners were consulted throughout the development of the GFF engagement model, the TRANSFORM 2030 strategy, and the implementation results framework, helping shape key priorities including domestic resource mobilization, adolescent health and nutrition, accountability, and community engagement.	**Building on already established constituency representation to renewed and more inclusive leadership, with more diverse regional, gender, and bilingual representation.**
Country engagement	CSO and YLO participation in investment cases, country platforms, and GFF-supported processes varied across countries and was often ad hoc and consultation-based. While progress led to the introduction of a KPI on CSO/youth participation, engagement remained uneven.	Structured support for CSO and YLO participation in investment cases, GFF-supported operations, and country dialogue processes will complement the expanded role of GFF country coordinators in strengthening engagement between civil society, governments, and World Bank teams and promoting more meaningful participation in country health financing and policy processes.	**From ad hoc participation to structured, measurable, and country-led engage-ment with progress assessed through the Results Framework.**

Financing	Between 2022 and 2024, the GFF NGO Host Project provided US$2.7 million in grants to 51 CSOs and YLOs across 28 countries, representing an average investment of approximately US$96,000 per country (and US$53,000 per grant) through 12-month grant cycles. These grants were delivered as part of a broader US$6 million investment, comprising US$5 million for the NGO Host Partner mechanism, including grants, technical assistance, coordination, and capacity-strengthening support, and US$1 million for implementation support and oversight.	The GFF TFC approved US$18 million for CSO and youth engagement. Of this envelope, US$12 million is allocated for GFF x CIVIC grants (US$10 million) and technical assistance (US$2 million), US$5 million to complementary country-level engagement (US$4 million) and implementation support and oversight (US$1 million), and US$1 million to CSCG and GYP coordination. Grants released under GFF x CIVIC are expected to be more than double those awarded in 2022–2024. Under GFF x CIVIC, country coalitions are expected to receive about US$150,000 through VOICES (22 countries) and about US$210,000 through ALIGN (12 countries). Each grant covers an 18-month implementation period and comes with tailored technical assistance and support for policy engagement and accountability.	**From average country investments of US$96,000 over 12 months to investments of US$150,000–US$210,000 over 18 months.**
Engagement platform	Support was delivered through subgrants, technical assistance, coordination, and learning mechanisms operated by one GFF NGO host partner. Grants reached 51 organizations across 28 countries.,	Creation of the GFF x CIVIC partnership, organized around VOICES and ALIGN, which is expected to reach 60-90 CSOs and YLOs across 26 countries (and a minimum of 26 YLOs with the explicit criteria that each country partnership includes a YLO). Beginning in 2027, these investments will be complemented by additional GFF-financed opportunities to support CSO and YLO engagement in investment cases, GFF-supported operations, country dialogue	**From one modality to engage to a scaled and integrated engagement architecture combining grants, a new technical assistance platform and further supporting linking**

		processes, and new partner countries, further expanding country-level engagement. At the global level, the CSCG and GYP will continue to be coordinated by an independent constituency coordination partner, supporting governance, communications, learning, and representation.	**engagement to WBG/GFF processes and investments, and direct support for participation in country processes.**

Upcoming Complementary Engagement at Country Level

The GFF's work with CSOs and YLOs will further deepen engagement within GFF country platforms, recognizing that the impact is greatest through participation and influence of health financing decisions when they are made. This support will focus on existing, government-led GFF platforms and Investment Case processes, including Country Compacts and Country Partnership Frameworks where relevant, and will not create duplicate consultation tracks.

Under this initiative, the GFF will finance the competitive selection of CSOs and YLOs, with calls and support available in the main languages of partner countries and dedicated support for local organizations, to:

- Support CSO and YLO engagement on forthcoming investment cases and new GFF co-financed pipeline operations, ensuring that civil society perspectives inform the design and prioritization of GFF country-level engagement from the outset. This includes structured opportunities for CSOs and YLOs to participate in investment case consultations, contribute community data and accountability perspectives, and engage with World Bank country teams and government counterparts. This support will be made available for countries where GFF x CIVIC Pillar 1 is not yet active.
- Pilot targeted CSOs/YLOs engagement to provide complementary support on GFF TRANSFORM 2030 innovations and scalable solutions, such as Sustainable Commodity Access Program (S-CAP) and Safer Births Bundle of Care (SBBC) as well as the gender agenda. For example, CSOs/YLOs would be competitively selected to ensure the voices of communities are heard and evidence shared during national dialogue (such as through conducting community surveys and their dissemination).
- Engage CSOs and YLOs in new GFF partner countries, ensuring that as the GFF expands its country footprint, civil society and youth organizations are supported to participate meaningfully in GFF country platforms from the beginning.

Renewed CSCG and GYP Leadership: A Strengthened Voice

The Global Civil Society Coordinating Group for the GFF (CSCG) and the Global Youth Platform (GYP), its dedicated platform for youth-led organizations and young advocates, are the primary global forums through which CSOs and YLOs engage in GFF governance and strategy. The CSCG and GYP represent over 850 members and hold elections for their steering committee and IG representatives. The CSCG convenes an annual workshop and quarterly webinars to align advocacy priorities, share learning, and feed community perspectives into GFF decision making.

The CSCG and GYP contributed to the consultations that shaped TRANSFORM 2030 and its results measurement framework. Their advocacy for domestic resource mobilization and adolescent health and nutrition is reflected in the strategy, where both are now central pillars of the new strategy.

Over the last two years, the CSCG leadership was renewed through elections that brought over 21 new civil society and youth leaders, including new Steering Committee and GFF Investors Group representatives, allowing broader regional representation and bringing new thematic expertise into GFF's civil society governance structure.

In September 2026, the GFF Secretariat selected Kinaura Partners (formerly Global Health Visions) through a competitive process to coordinate the activities of the GFF's CSCG and GYP over the next two years. In this role, Kinaura will help organize convenings of the CSCG and GYP, including the annual workshop; provide technical support to the civil society and youth representatives on the IG; and support strategic communications, advocacy, and capacity strengthening for CSCG and GYP members to enable meaningful engagement among the constituencies. Kinaura will also coordinate closely with the two new CSO/YLO consortia managing the grants and technical assistance to CSOs and YLOs across 26 partner countries. Kinaura will co-develop with the CSCG, the GYP and the Secretariat a CSO/YLO results framework aligned with TRANSFORM 2030.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

• **Sustainability and Momentum:** As the updated engagement model moves into implementation, how can GFF support the sustainability, effectiveness, and long-term impact of civil society and youth engagement at country and global levels, particularly in resource-constrained settings? What indicators would demonstrate that civil society and youth perspectives are meaningfully influencing Investment Cases, policy dialogue, priority-setting, and financing decisions?

• **Equity and Outcomes**: How can the GFF and its partners best ensure civil society and youth engagement accelerates more equitable health and nutrition outcomes for women, children, and adolescents under TRANSFORM 2030?

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