

Envisioning a world where all children can soar...



Dear ECFG members and partners,

In 2021, Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG) celebrates a decade of history working within philanthropy to more effectively meet the needs of the world's most marginalized and vulnerable children. During one of the most tumultuous times in recent memory, in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic and worldwide challenges to racial injustice and colonial structures, our network set out to reexamine and renew our shared purpose, and chart a path forward via a new strategic plan.

With the expert help of I.G. Advisors, we designed an ambitious and incredibly participatory process including extensive consultations with external stakeholders and a series of grantee focus groups. Together, we engaged in serious inquiry about the change we wanted to see in the world, how we thought that change might happen, and what actions we could take collectively to make the biggest impact. We are so grateful for all of you who willingly stepped forward to lend your voice to this process. In a testament to the energy and solidarity we have built over the past couple of years, every one of our member organizations contributed to this strategic development effort, and the result is all the better for it.

What has emerged is an inspiring new direction for ECFG that expands upon the successful work of the past several years and positions the network to adapt to complex and dynamic realities in the years ahead. It recognizes that realizing rights is central to child and youth wellbeing, and that we have a special responsibility to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable. It presents bold

new areas of work in decolonizing philanthropy and child and youth participation as core elements of ensuring we reach our end goals. It calls on all of us - as individuals, organizations, a network, and a field - to collaborate more purposefully in support of increased and improved funding for children and youth.

We are eager and excited to dive into implementing this plan with our members and the broader community of organizations and individuals working to change the world for children. ECFG is a small but intrepid group that recognizes that we truly are stronger together. May the enthusiasm and energy we have put into this effort continue to carry us forward as we collectively author the next important chapter of ECFG's work to help change the world with and for children.

In solidarity,

Mark Guy

Senior Program Officer
GHR Foundation
ECFG Steering Committee Chair

Heather Hamiton

Executive Director
Elevate Children Funders Group



Vision and Mission



VISION:

We envision a world where children and youth can thrive, exercise their rights, and live a life free from adversity. We focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.



MISSION

We are the leading global network of funders focused exclusively on the wellbeing and rights of children and youth. We support children and youth by building a community of funders and creating spaces for:

- Greater learning and effectiveness in how we use our individual resources
- More collaboration and alignment across our varied philanthropic strategies
- Collective action for more and better funding, and support for our wider field

Ecosystem Theory of Change

Since the traditional way of thinking about a Theory of Change is quite linear - charting the A-to-B steps between the current problem, and the intended impact - attempting to take a collective or systems view of creating change can present a challenge. ECFG knows that creating impact for children and youth is not linear; the field is a complex system within which change is multifaceted.

Because of this, ECFG decided to develop an ecosystem view of the children and youth funding space, working together to develop a map of the desired outcomes for the field as a whole. This Theory of Change is meant to be a tool for funders in the child and youth space; a framework for discussing goals, priorities, and needs; and a map to find leverage points. It is not necessarily tailored to the needs of other actors in the ecosystem or an exhaustive exploration of children's needs. We do hope that it serves as an initial contribution to what is a much broader conversation needed in our field.

The Ecosystem Theory of Change positions funders as one of three interdependent stakeholder groups: 1) children & youth themselves (plus their immediate caregivers and communities); 2) the practitioners and institutions that impact their lives (including grantees and state infrastructure); and 3) the resource holders who enable that impact (i.e. funders and ECFG members). Each of these groups have specific outcomes they are striving to achieve towards the vision for children. This non-linear approach acknowledges the ways each group can inform, influence, and add value to the others' work, framing the ecosystem as regenerative, rather than extractive.

The Ecosystem Theory of Change contains several layers:



VISION:

the ideal end state for children and youth globally (*long term*)



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

high-level values and approaches the network stands for



OUTCOMES

a breakdown and more detailed descriptors of the ideal end states for each stakeholder group in the mid-term (*medium term*)



PRECONDITIONS

statements describing the change required to achieve the outcomes, split into structural (policy, practice & resource flows), relational (relationships, connections and power dynamics), and transformational (mental models) (*near term*)



BEFORE YOU START

The traditional way of thinking about a Theory of Change is linear, charting steps from current problem to intended impact. However, when taking a holistic view of the field, the linear model struggles to accommodate the volume of different actors, the complexity of interdependencies, and the realities of overlapping and siloed work, funding flows, varying qualities of programmes, and misaligned approaches.

We have left the linear model behind and taken more of an ecosystem view of the children and youth funding field. We wanted to create a map of the desired outcomes for the field as a whole, so have developed a radial theory of change, acknowledging the ways each stakeholder group can inform, influence, and add value to the other's work.

We recognize that this is just an initial contribution to what is a much broader conversation needed in our field. It is not meant to be comprehensive, but a starting point for discussion.

We hope that funders in the space will be able to use this as a map to identify 'levers' that can be pulled for greater individual, organisational, and collective impact.

HOW TO READ

- 1 **Vision**
- 2 **Guiding Principles**
- 3 **Stakeholders and Outcomes**
- 4 **Preconditions**

This may also be read in reverse direction, starting with the preconditions that your organization seeks to influence and working back to how that contributes to the shared vision.

ECOSYSTEM THEORY OF CHANGE

1

OUR VISION

AT THE CORE OF ALL THAT WE DO IS OUR VISION, OUR SHARED PURPOSE:

We envision a world where children and youth can thrive, exercise their rights, and live a life free from adversity.

2

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles are not goals or outcomes, but underlying principles and values that are needed to achieve this vision. They are inherent in every stage of the change process. To achieve this vision, we must...

- ◆ Stand in **solidarity** with children, youth, & grassroots movements
- ◆ **Shift power** within ourselves, our institutions, & our sectors
- ◆ Champion rights-based, intersectional approaches
- ◆ Champion **whole child approaches**
- ◆ Champion **gender justice** across all work
- ◆ Use a **systems change** lens
- ◆ Prioritize **global collaboration**
- ◆ Leverage **common frameworks**
- ◆ Challenge **attitudes & norms**
- ◆ Support **evidence-based** Interventions

3

STAKEHOLDERS AND OUTCOMES
mid-term changes for each stakeholder group

Stakeholders:
PRACTITIONERS & INSTITUTIONS

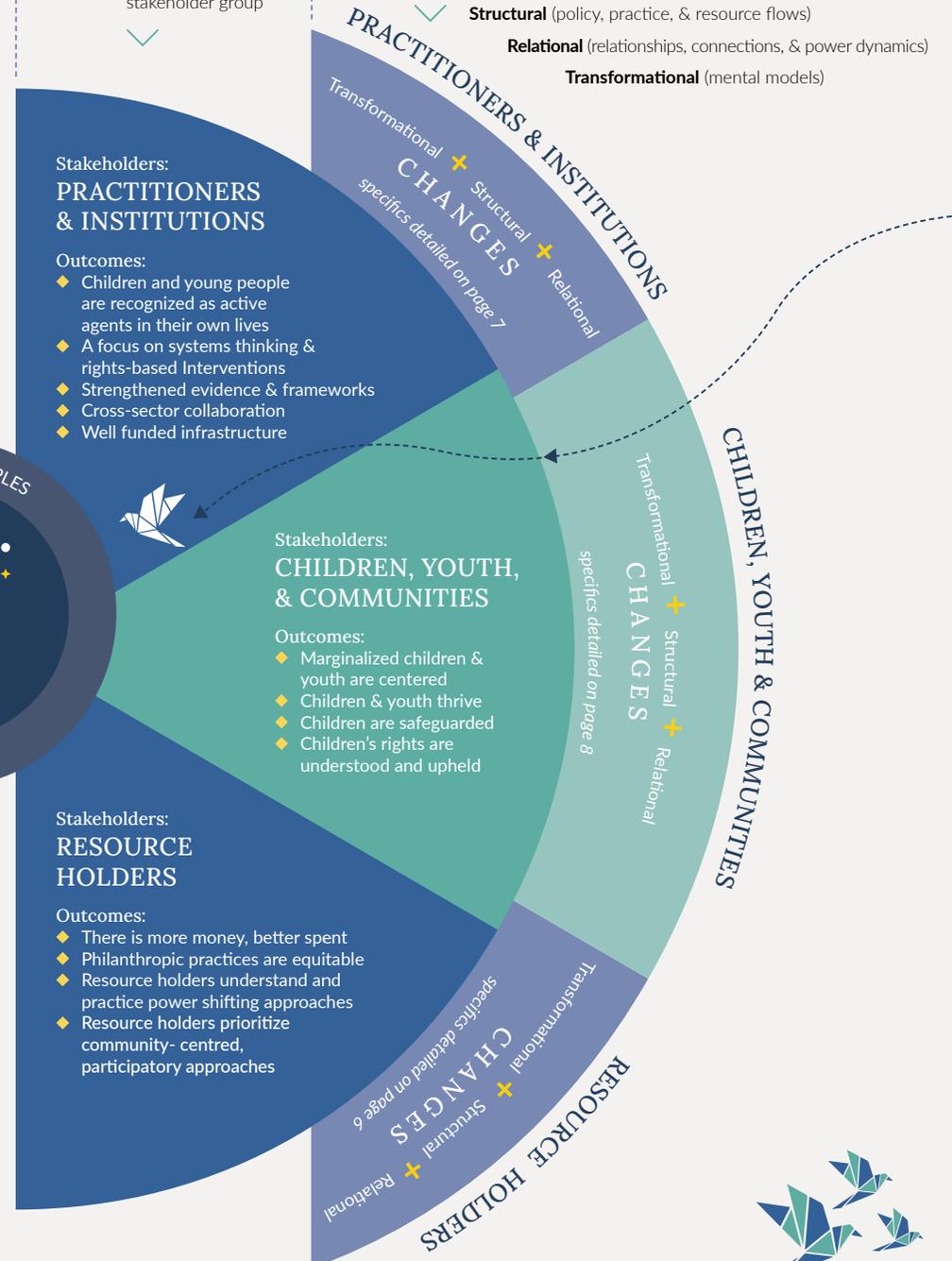
Outcomes:

- ◆ Children and young people are recognized as active agents in their own lives
- ◆ A focus on systems thinking & rights-based Interventions
- ◆ Strengthened evidence & frameworks
- ◆ Cross-sector collaboration
- ◆ Well funded infrastructure

4

PRECONDITIONS
near term changes that are necessary to achieve mid-term outcomes, based on the [Water of Change systems-change model](#)

- ✓ **Structural** (policy, practice, & resource flows)
- ✓ **Relational** (relationships, connections, & power dynamics)
- ✓ **Transformational** (mental models)



Practitioners & Institutions

OUTCOMES



- ▶ **Agency of children & young people** - Practitioners & institutions recognize children and young people as active agents in their own lives: a key stakeholder group for any programme, policy or initiative; entitled to be listened to, respected and granted increasing autonomy in the exercise of their rights.
- ▶ **Systems thinking** - Practitioners & institutions provide interventions and programmes that better-support children and young people who are marginalised within the current system - while also working to disrupt the systems that marginalise them in the first place.
- ▶ **Rights-based interventions** - Practitioners & institutions support children and young people with rights-based interventions that acknowledge the various intersections of experience and marginalisation that affect safety, progress and opportunity.
- ▶ **Evidence & frameworks** - Evidence-based approaches and global frameworks are used by practitioners & institutions as tools for change - while also being challenged and strengthened to ensure methodologies are inclusive, equitable and impactful.
- ▶ **Cross-sector collaboration** - There is multi-sectoral, collaborative investment and programming from practitioners & institutions to ensure children are protected and thriving across all areas of their development.
- ▶ **Well funded infrastructure** - There is well-funded infrastructure for practitioners & infrastructure to support families, children and young people, and those with power and resources are held accountable to equitable impact.

PRECONDITIONS



TRANSFORMATIONAL

- ▶ Increased understanding of the impossibility of achieving any social or environmental aims without considering and including children
- ▶ Increased understanding of - and passion for - intersectional systems change, and its critical role across the ecosystem of child and youth care.
- ▶ Increased understanding of trauma-informed interventions that centre the needs and rights of children
- ▶ Increased understanding of local, cultural approaches that protect and care for children - in addition to globally-adopted frameworks and interventions

RELATIONAL

- ▶ Improved ability to reach - and deliver impact for - marginalised children and youth.
- ▶ Increased intersectionality, and cross-sector development approaches for children and youth.
- ▶ Stronger influence with those that hold power (e.g. governments, funders, etc.) in order to set the agenda
- ▶ Increased agency of local community-based organisations, in addition to international NGOs.
- ▶ Stronger partnerships with resource holders that enable flexible, iterative, long-term interventions
- ▶ Stronger collaboration across key actors in the field (from non-profits and CSOs, through to governments and agencies), with reduced competition, to ensure learning & evidence is shared and built upon.

STRUCTURAL

- ▶ Increased prevalence of specialist second- and third-tier bodies to support practitioners and institutions to succeed in centring and serving children.
- ▶ Increased research and evaluation to inform and iterate approaches.
- ▶ Improved efficiency and accuracy in identifying barriers to children thriving, and developing effective interventions to address them.
- ▶ Improved use of locally- and culturally-appropriate measures of success, with a reduced reliance on Western evidence and best practices.
- ▶ Reduced focus quantitative over qualitative measures of success, leading to more holistic programmes and deeper support for caregivers and children.
- ▶ Improved capacity to anticipate risk, and be resilient to challenges.
- ▶ Improved and increased advocacy at local and national levels.
- ▶ Better integration of children's needs into mainstream services.



Children, Youth & Communities

OUTCOMES



- ▶ **Centering marginalised children & youth** - The needs, rights and voices of children and young people facing the greatest systemic inequalities - on a local and global scale - are centred in all policy, legal, educational, and caregiving work. This includes an understanding of the marginalising effects of violence and trauma, and leads to the pursuit of equity for all.
- ▶ **Thriving children & youth** - Children are valued and respected by the people, communities and systems in their lives. They are able to advocate for themselves; and develop agency, resilience, confidence and capacity. This means they stay emotionally and physically healthy, access and seize opportunity, play a meaningful role in society, and experience fulfilment.
- ▶ **Safeguarding & recovery from adversity** - Children and young people have caregivers, communities and services that are enabled - through resources, knowledge, coordination and support - to work with them to create an environment that values and safeguards everyone, enables them to play an increasing role in their own protection decisions, rejects all forms of violence and abuse, and supports holistic recovery for those who survive harm.
- ▶ **Understood and upheld rights** - Children's rights are defined through meaningful participation that is appropriate for their evolving capacities as well as an understanding of their value in society. These rights are enshrined in laws and policies; and understood and respected by those with power, influence or guardianship over their lives.

- ▶ Increased understanding of the harm done by systems of oppression and domination - including colonialism, patriarchy, adultism, and others - and the mechanisms needed to disrupt these.
- ▶ Increased understanding of mental health and the impact of trauma, alongside the interventions needed for intergenerational healing
- ▶ Increased knowledge of children and youth rights, and the principles of social justice across relevant social and cultural contexts.
- ▶ Improved understanding of childhood development and needs, particularly among caregivers

RELATIONAL

- ▶ Improved access to practitioners and institutions that can support and protect children
- ▶ Greater acceptance and inclusion of marginalised children
- ▶ Increased access to safe spaces and people where children can seek refuge and support
- ▶ Strengthened family units, and adults, that protect and nurture children
- ▶ More agency and power for children and youth in all aspects of their communities and lives.

STRUCTURAL

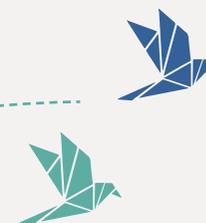
- ▶ Strengthened involvement of children and youth in decision making.
- ▶ Improved safeguarding and protection for children and youth across all areas of their lives.
- ▶ Improved and increased systems, services and support for children and youth that centre their rights and agency.
- ▶ Increased social and economic justice for children and youth

PRECONDITIONS



TRANSFORMATIONAL

- ▶ Increased perception of children as leaders in their communities and experiences, with agency and power, by both children themselves and the communities that care for them.
- ▶ Increased understanding of intersectional issues (e.g. climate change) that directly impact future generations
- ▶ Increased understanding of trauma-informed interventions that centre the needs and rights of children



Resource Holders



Within the Resource Holders section of the ecosystem, ECFG is well positioned to influence on nearly all elements, and particularly these bolded preconditions.

OUTCOMES



- ▶ **More money, better spent** - Global collaboration, advocacy and coordination – within the philanthropic sector, and beyond – is prioritised to increase investment in children; improve impact, efficiency and effectiveness; reduce siloes; and lower risk.
- ▶ **Equitable philanthropic practice** - Philanthropic practice iterates and improves based on the best existing and emerging practices, informed by deep listening to grantees and children, focussed on addressing the roots of their needs, and sustained through alignment between programme staff and board members.
- ▶ **Power-shifting approaches** - Resource holders understand the value of power-shifting philanthropy, and advocate for it within their circles of influence. They approach their work and role in the ecosystem with humility.
- ▶ **Community-centred, participatory approaches** - Resource holders ensure their work always serves children and youth, and keeps up with the work of grassroots movements. Strategies and programmes are shaped and informed by people (including children and youth) with lived experience of the injustices the sector is seeking to address.

- ▶ Greater awareness of adultism, and adult-centric view points, and recognition of the limits and risks of that in decision making and programming

RELATIONAL

- ▶ **More and better collaboration across - and beyond - the children's funding field to strengthen approaches, increase trust and support collective advocacy.**
- ▶ **Increased infrastructure to support collective advocacy that strengthens the field, based on mutual trust and values.**
- ▶ **More incentives and mechanisms for resource holders to be comfortable with being uncomfortable - and seek power-shifting partnerships that deepen their understanding and impact.**
- ▶ Increased integration of underrepresented voices in decision making, particularly from children and youth themselves to reduce adultism.
- ▶ **More and better coordination and transparency between funders**
- ▶ **Greater understanding of the funding ecosystem as a symbiotic network of relationships between those leading social change and those funding it**

STRUCTURAL

- ▶ **Increased funding and new funders for children (particularly the most marginalised and vulnerable), as well as mainstreaming children's needs in other funding fields.**
- ▶ **Improved collection, use and sharing of knowledge, data and learning to inform decision making, particularly on funding flows, gaps, needs and strategies across the field.**
- ▶ **Increased advocacy work within the funding space, directed at peers, dominant institutions and boards.**
- ▶ **Improved distribution of resources - avoiding over- or under-funding of specific organisations, regions and issues, and ensuring partnerships are flexible, multi-year and mindful of power.**
- ▶ Improved tolerance for 'risky' and labor-intensive approaches, intended to reduce risk and work for grantees.
- ▶ **Improved nuance and sophistication in discussions, debates and decisions on funding practice and policies, leaving space for diversity of thought and approaches.**
- ▶ More and better funding for child and youth-, locally- and community-led work, leading to a reduced reliance on large, Global North intermediaries, such as INGOs.
- ▶ Increased funding for less tangible, non-linear, and complex initiatives, such as movements and other systems actors - in addition to direct service provision.

PRECONDITIONS



TRANSFORMATIONAL

- ▶ Increased awareness of, and passion to change, the pervasive colonialism and white supremacy across the sector - that is in many cases fundamental to the way resource holders acquire wealth in the first place.
- ▶ **Increased focus on systems change - in addition to the direct delivery of services - stemming from increased understanding of the iterative and complex nature of change**
- ▶ **Increased awareness of the power dynamics inherent in resource holders' work, and of the importance of power-shifting, participatory approaches in the sector.**
- ▶ Increased understanding of intersecting fields and actors, and therefore the importance of systems thinking in funding strategies.
- ▶ More collective challenging of the 'way things are done' to ensure all approaches are truly impact-centric and designed to meet the needs of children and youth, rather than resource holders themselves.
- ▶ Greater risk tolerance among resource holders - and a re-defining of 'risk' altogether to ensure the sector is taking the appropriate 'risks' needed for change.
- ▶ **More global frameworks and approaches that centre the needs and perspectives of the Global South, for true global collaboration**

ECFG's Goal & Strategies (2021-2023)

GOALS

In 10 Years, We Want to Make X Happen ...



STRATEGIES

To Do That, We Plan To



Our Field & Beyond

We **leverage more and better funding, and collaborative action**, for children and youth in adversity - across and beyond our philanthropic field.

- ▶ We will cultivate and incubate **collaborative funding opportunities**, both among us members and with external partners
- ▶ We will develop and disseminate **evidence-based research** with targeted advocacy to key players in and beyond the children/youth field
- ▶ We will **make the case** for increased funding and attention for holistic approaches to children's rights and wellbeing and **challenge dominant narratives** harmful to children and youth
- ▶ We will **forge relationships** with new audiences - particularly funders and potential funders - and place child/youth needs and rights in key international debates and within other sectors' goals

Our Collaborative Network

We are a **thriving, diverse network** representative of funders in the field. Our collaborations lead to stronger alignment and impact across our collective strategies - and ultimately, greater impact for children & youth.

- ▶ We will **grow and diversify our membership** of philanthropic foundations
- ▶ We will **host official gatherings** that enable members to come together and collaborate
- ▶ Our Secretariat will **serve as our network glue and weaver** by developing and maintaining knowledge of members interests and activities, actively connecting members with shared interests, and proving informal opportunities for connection

Our Individual Grant-Craft

Our **knowledge, skills, and individual grant-crafts** are strong, progressive and effective - leading to more impactful grant-making, and ultimately greater impact for children & youth.

- ▶ We will **track developments** across the field and provide regular updates and access to new evidence, learning, and innovations
- ▶ We will identify shared challenges in grant-craft and philanthropy, and support **research, resources, and training to increase our effectiveness**
- ▶ We will cultivate regular opportunities for information **sharing, learning** about innovative approaches, sharing of best practices, and identification of potential collaboration
- ▶ We will explore ways to understand and **shift power within our work** - and ensure our key strategic decisions are informed by the communities we are aiming to serve

Our Secretariat

We have a **fit-for-purpose Secretariat and organizational structure** that supports member needs, and our wider impact goals.

- ▶ Our Secretariat will maintain a **strong, inclusive and effective team** that is adequately resourced and operationalized to deliver on our strategy
- ▶ Our Secretariat will ensure our **governance structures** are effective and representative
- ▶ Our Secretariat will **diversify ECFGs core funding**
- ▶ We will establish regular **monitoring, evaluation, and learning** processes so we can integrate learnings for the future
- ▶ We will practice **radical and collective self-care** in our governance and team

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