



community  
philanthropy  
in brazil:

principles,  
practices and  
experiences

executive summary

**comuá** comuá network  
transforming  
philanthropy

# 1. introduction: trajectory and context of this publication

**T**his publication, developed in partnership with ponteAponte, is the result of a number of initiatives developed by the Comuá Network in recent years, involving several local and international partners. As part of this journey, in 2018, the Comuá Network started a partnership with GIFE (Group of Institutes, Foundations, and Companies) and GFCF (Global Fund for Community Foundations) in view of promoting a series of meetings to discuss the theme of community philanthropy with donors. The goal was to foster the sharing of experiences, engagement, and awareness among new actors working in the field of philanthropy and ISP<sup>1</sup> (private social investment).

In 2019, continuing the partnership, Comuá organized the seminar “Expanding and Strengthening Community Philanthropy in Brazil,” based on the following guiding question: “How can community philanthropy contribute to sustainable development in Brazil and promote lasting change?”<sup>2</sup> Part of the debates held during the seminar relied on research that was being conducted at the time, emphasizing that the concept was still scarcely explored and not well known within the philanthropic ecosystem and by local civil society organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://gife.org.br/filantropia-comunitaria-uma-estrategia-de-atuacao-com-os-territorios-nao-para-eles/>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://gife.org.br/seminario-aborda-diferentes-formas-de-filantropia-comunitaria-no-brasil/>

As a result of the Seminar, the publication [Expanding and strengthening community philanthropy in Brazil](#) was launched that same year (reissued in 2021 under the *Giving for Change* label), which, from a material historic perspective, produced an initial diagnosis on the subject, based on the assumption that community philanthropy should be understood as a field in permanent construction, as a manner of acting within social reality based on the development of initiatives and coordination with various actors and dynamics, without the imposition of “top-down” solutions. Leveraging the power of communities so they can find their own solutions to existing problems and build the common good.

The publication emphasized the notion that there is no absolute definition for community philanthropy since, as it is a material concept, built on practices, it also acquires specific characteristics in each social context. In Brazil, there is a diversity of actors in the field of community philanthropy, such as community foundations (which do not necessarily fit the U.S. model), thematic and community funds, and, for this reason, the “tropicalization” of the concept has advanced.

In 2022, Comuá began the process of mapping independent donor organizations for civil society. Conducted in partnership with ponteAponte, the process resulted in a publication that was released to the public in 2023: [Transforming philanthropy: mapping of independent donor organizations for civil society in the fields of socio-environmental justice and community development in Brazil](#). The publication presents an unprecedented study of the organizations engaging in this field, indicating that community philanthropy practices are present and ex-

pressive in the country, and at the same time that they can be seen as a movement that proposes to change power relations by supporting the organizations working with these agendas.

In the same year, the Comuá Network, continuing these reflections and collective constructions on the subject, started the process of expanding its visions with private social investment (ISP) organizations and community philanthropy for socio-environmental justice entities about the challenges and opportunities in fostering these practices, emphasizing them as a possible, transformative path for the development of grant-making<sup>3</sup> actions, and taking a step further by systematizing practices and sharing experiences in the field.

The process, which resulted in this publication, involved the work of a consultancy<sup>4</sup> firm, focused on presenting assertive ways to strengthen community philanthropy within the ISP context.

To complete the work, a decision was made to present and reflect on the practices of community philanthropy through the experiences developed by the Comuá Network's member organizations, which are strategic actors in this field.

**3** Grantmaking consists of allocating financial resources (grants), in a structured manner, to public interest initiatives or organizations, thus distinguishing itself from the operation of one's own projects. Source: [https://bit.ly/definicao\\_grantmaking](https://bit.ly/definicao_grantmaking)

**4** Dialógica and Oliva Consortium

## 2. community philanthropy and private social investment in brazil

**S**ince the aim of this publication is to present practices, challenges and opportunities to prompt reflection among the organizations working in the ISP field in Brazil about the forms of donation and how the practices of community and socio-environmental justice philanthropy contribute to social transformation in Brazil, this publication sought to identify the current trends in the philanthropy ecosystem based on existing studies, such as the [GIFE Census](#), the [Mapping of Independent Donor Organizations](#), executed by the Comuá Network in partnership with ponteAponte, and the study titled "[Peripheries and Philanthropy – the barriers to accessing resources in Brazil](#)".

Analyzing the information, we find that civil society organizations have difficulty accessing financial resources because public and private investments (from corporate and family philanthropy) are not always distributed in an inclusive, flexible manner, which would allow the priority demands of communities and territories to be met.

## ISP (GIFE Census)

- The study interviewed **137** organizations associated with GIFE.

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- The percentage of institutional support for CSOs grew (in absolute figures, there was an increase of **R\$ 400 million** in the funds passed on to third parties), but it remains the type of support least practiced by social investors. The transfer accounted for approximately **17%** of the total investment volume (**R\$ 838 million**).

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- **64%** of respondents (**88** members) informed that they have transferred funds to CSOs, amounting to **6,792** grants.

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- Social movements, collectives and networks are supported by **20%** of the respondents.

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- Among the ISP's focus areas, education ranks first (**71%**), followed by productive inclusion, entrepreneurship and income generation (**54%**), and tied in third place, local/territorial/community development (**50%**).

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- On the other hand, rights advocacy, the culture of peace and democracy, and the institutional development of CSOs and social movements rank lower, accounting for **38%** and **36%** of the responses, respectively.

## Independent philanthropy (Comuá Network Mapping)

- The mapping produced data on **31** independent donor organizations.

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- **74%** of the mapped institutions donate to civil society organizations, and **71%** to movements and collectives (formalized or not).

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- **49%** of the mapped organizations transferred up to **R\$1 million**, while **35%** donated from **R\$1 million** to over **R\$25 million**.

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- The **14** member organizations of the Comuá Network that participated in the mapping had directly donated nearly **R\$ 472 million** by **2021**.

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- Among the mapped themes, the main one is institutional strengthening (**74%**), followed by gender and women's rights (**48%**) and culture (**48%**).

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- Also noteworthy are themes related to communities, local development, and traditional peoples, such as community development (**42%**), family farming, urban agriculture, agroecology, and agroforestry (**39%**), and indigenous, quilombola, riverside and traditional communities (**35%**).

## Peripheries and philanthropy (PIPA)

- The study collected data from **607** responses by managers working in the frontlines in Brazil's peripheries to secure basic rights.

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- **95%** of the surveyed institutions reported difficulties accessing funding for projects.

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- Approximately **15%** of the projects receive no external funding.

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- **46%** received no funding to carry out their activities in the past two years.

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- And **31%** worked with less than **R\$5,000** a year.

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- **72%** of the initiatives answered that they require more knowledge about financial management.

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- **56.5%** noted the excessively bureaucratic process of rendering of accounts.

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- The majority of the organizations (**41.8%**) are collectives which, although active in their territories, lack a formal registration/CNPJ number.

# 3. principles guiding the practices of community philanthropy in brazil

**B**ased on the collection and systemization of data and information on community philanthropy, in light of the work developed by the Comuá Network's member organizations, as well as the contributions from other Brazilian philanthropic organizations, we were able to map the main practices employed, to a greater or lesser extent, in the work of the organizations operating in the field.

Based on the assumption that there is not one single way to do community philanthropy, but rather practices adopted through joint construction with civil society organizations and movements, in partnerships and according to the territories' actual needs, we have **identified the principles that guide the practices.**

## Principle 01

Recognition and appreciation of the supported organizations' assets: knowledge, skills, networks, people, experiences

## Principle 02

Recognition of the supported organizations' autonomy to design and define the project's direction and its management, in terms of both decision-making and resource management

## Principle 03

Development of actions aimed at strengthening local leadership and the community fabric

## Principle 04

Investing, through donations (financial or otherwise), in the institutional strengthening of the supported organizations

## Principle 05

Prioritizing themes and audiences associated with historically minoritized groups, with a history of rights violations (black people, women, LGBTQIAPN+, indigenous and traditional peoples)

## Principle 06

Adopting processes and mechanisms that facilitate broad access to financial resources and accountability by the supported organizations

## Principle 07

Promoting diversity and the participation of representatives of the supported organizations in internal decision-making processes/instances within the Institute/Foundation (governance)



Photo: Shane Rounce | Unsplash

## 4. experiences and initiatives in community philanthropy in brazil

The following initiatives are characterized by the employment of social practices and technologies aligned with the values of community philanthropy, and indicate possible ways to replicate and multiply the practices in other scenarios. They also contribute to the systematization and dissemination of content on their institutional pages, on the internet and social media, including a description of the realities in which they exist, activity reports, impact assessments, ultimately, a variety of information associated with their work.



### **engaja serra: community development fund “strengthening powers to reduce inequality”**

One of [Tabôa – Community Reinforcement](#)’s most recent strategies, with a focus on the territory of Serra Grande and its surroundings, in Bahia, is the “Engaja Serra” movement – a broad range of actions aimed at con-

necting people, community initiatives and strategic causes to strengthen community leadership in view of the fair, sustainable development of the region.

Among the movement's many actions, the **Community Development Fund** stands out, created on the basis of fostering a culture of giving (also among residents) to mobilize resources in order to strengthen local collectives, groups and organizations. The initiative was supported by the Comuá Network within the context of the Advocacy Support Program.

In 2022, a fundraising campaign was executed with partners (Brazilian and international) to enable actions to structure the Fund and prepare an experimental round of support, around themes that had been raised in studies conducted by Tabôa: youths and gender equality. Three initiatives were supported, and each received an investment of R\$ 35 thousand, along with technical support for their institutional development for approximately one year.

### + information

- » **Executor:** [Tabôa – Community Reinforcement](#).
- » **Initial funders for the structuring of the Fund and the first round of support:** [Comuá Network](#); [Global Fund for Communities Foundation](#); [Connecting Communities in the Americas](#) (CCA); [Institute for the Development of Social Investment](#) (IDIS).

- » **Other funders:** individual donors, albeit incipient still.
- » **Institutional partners for the sharing of practices and knowledge:** [ICOM](#) (Instituto Comunitário Grande Florianópolis); [FunBEA](#) (Brazilian Environmental Education Fund).
- » **Initiatives potentialized between 2022/2023** (contempladas na primeira rodada de apoio): [Associação Cultural Circo da Lua](#); [Saberes e Sabores Community Fair](#); [Serra Cria Collective](#).



## agbara fund: the first black women's fund of brazil

The Agbara Fund is a pioneer in supporting exclusively initiatives by black women. It operates through several pillars, including: racial female empowerment, entrepreneurship and creative economy, income generation and productive inclusion, responsible consumption, reduction of inequality, high quality education, culture of giving and community development.

It launched three “Avança, preta! (Go forth, black woman!)” calls for proposals, which mobilized a total of R\$ 146 thousand in direct support for 80 women. The

amounts vary according to the size of the projects, and the idea is that 50% of the resources be applied to the organization's business plan.

It also develops four other programs: Atunlo Ife, aimed at training and financially supporting black women working with recycling and waste handling; Ajeum, aimed at supporting black women with initiatives to generate income in the food sector; Lewá, aimed at supporting black women in the field of aesthetics; Ileré, focusing on the black women's health.

All actions considered, more than R\$8 million have already been raised, 340 initiatives have been recognized, and approximately 4,676 women have been directly and indirectly impacted.

### + information

- » **Executor:** [Agbara Fund](#)
- » **Initial funders:** [Tide Setubal Foundation](#); [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#); [Prospera Social](#); [Brazil Foundation](#); [Casa Socio-Environmental Fund](#).
- » **Other funders:** donation from individuals, albeit incipient still.
- » **Agbara's institutional partners:** [Take Me](#); [CUFA](#); [Aurueras Institute](#); [SINTPq](#); [Advice – Advisory Accounting](#); [Grifa](#); [Mercado Pago](#); [PROAC](#); [Mercado](#)

[Livres; CIVI-CO; Formmer Afro; Insecta; Benfeitoria;](#)  
[Bolo de Mesa, Gestão Group; Foundation](#)  
[Emanuele Antola; Artemisia; Motorola; Olho no](#)  
[olho; Secretariat of Culture and Creative Economy;](#)  
[Taul Chequer | Mayer Brown.](#)



## impact for social justice fund - icom

ICOM is a community foundation with the goal of promoting social development in Florianópolis (SC). Its operations are based on three strategic foundations: Strengthening organized civil society; Encouraging private social investment; and Community articulation and knowledge.

The Impact for Social Justice Fund was created in 2018 as an action strategy for the second foundation, , in partnership with Impact Hub and Semente Negócios, which over a period of five years has published calls for proposals focusing on themes such as the rights of LGBTQIAPN+ people, gender equity, the Covid-19 pandemic, domestic violence and, in 2022, racial equity.

For the call for proposals aimed at organizations focusing on the cause of racial equity, R\$60,000 were raised through the Fund's fundraising actions – which were fully allocated to the winning initiatives. Out of the 17 organizations that applied, three were selected to re-

ceive a contribution of R\$20,000 each, in addition to the technical support and mentoring offered by ICOM for five months: Batuk Freak, Mittos Group, and Instituto É da Nossa Cor.

The number of applications received in 2022 also enabled the strengthening of other ICOM initiatives, such as the Community Articulation and Knowledge strategic foundation. The application forms for the call for proposals allowed for the mapping of 17 new initiatives and an active search for an additional 44 organizations focusing on the theme of racial equity.

### + information

- » **Executor:** [ICOM - Instituto Comunitário Grande Florianópolis](#)
- » **Financiadores iniciais:** [Comuá Network](#), [Impact Hub Floripa](#) and [Semente Negócios](#)
- » **Financiadores atuais:** Legal Entities - [ACATE](#), [Cheesecake Lab](#), [Impact Hub](#), [Instituto Now](#) and [Semente Negócios](#). Individuals - Alline Goulart, Azor El Achkar, Cheila Zortéa, Elena Rivero, Estela Benetti, Felipe Rocha Maia, Guilherme Sarkis, Henrique Bussacos, Jean Carlo Roversi, João Victor Antonioli, Lucia Dellagnelo, Mariane Maier Nunes, Roberto Kiviti, Stefani Ceolla, Thaís Regina Balistieri, Zoe Silva, Gabriela Werner, Yasmin Moraes, Indianara P., Débora Rodrigues, Aghata Gonsalves

- » **ICOM's institutional partners:** [Motive - Consciência em Ação](#), Macedo Family, Gomes Vieira Family, [ASAS - Incorporações e Habitat](#), Gaiamar Administração Patrimonial LTDA.



## alliance between funds

The social, economic, and political aggravations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had an even more serious impact on groups that were already experiencing vulnerability. The Brazil Fund, Casa Socio-Environmental Fund, and Baobá Fund for Racial Equity saw in collaborative philanthropy for social justice the possibility to create a bold, effective governance in order to build responses to the urgent demands of quilombola communities and indigenous peoples, which were aggravated by the pandemic.

So, in 2021, within the scope of the Comuá Network, the [Alliance between Funds](#) emerged as a strategic, innovative action in the course of exchanges and dialogues on the obstacles and lessons learned while strengthening the agenda for social justice. The initiative was only possible due to the strong relationships of trust built over the years with the community base.

Each fund operates in specific territories, thus eliminating the overlap of institutions in common territories. However, the strategies are joint and the exchanges and learning are shared, optimizing resources and leveraging results. Out of the 78 projects supported after three calls for proposals, 100% of the funds were allocated to those groups. More than R\$5 million were mobilized, allocated to 68 quilombola organizations and 10 indigenous groups, from 19 states, in all regions of the country.

### + information

- » **Executors:** [Baobá Fund for Racial Equity](#), [Brazil Fund of Human Rights](#) and [Casa Socio-Environmental Fund](#)
- » **Financers and partners:** [Comuá Network](#), [Inter-American Foundation](#) and [Meraki Institute](#)



## territorial alliance: strengthening communities and territories

Launched in 2023, from a Comuá Network Community of Practices, the [Territorial Alliance](#) consists of seven organizations: Casa Fluminense, FunBEA (Brazilian

Environmental Education Fund), Baixada Maranhense Community Institute, Procomum Institute, ICOM (Instituto Comunitário Grande Florianópolis), Redes da Maré, and Tabôa – Community Reinforcement.

These organizations, located in different regions of the country, have in common the fact that they recognize territories as a power and a decisive place for the affirmation, assurance and advocacy for rights and life. They all make donations (grantmaking) and either develop projects on their own or through regional, national and international partnerships. Together, their



Photo: Territorial Alliance

actions reached 136 municipalities in eight Brazilian states in 2022. Between 2022 and the first half of 2023, R\$2,543,155.42 were contributed by way of direct donations and R\$3,919,654.64 by way of indirect donations. 1,013 individuals/leaders and 451 collectives, organizations, movements, and groups were supported.

71% of the organizations that make up the Alliance rely on the participation of leaders within the territories to make strategic decisions. 86% participate in national thematic networks of action and territorial networks. 70% carry out advocacy actions. And 57% sit on municipal, state or federal public policy councils.

The Alliance intends to consolidate its governance model and build solid work models over a period of two years, to only then allow new organizations to join.

### + information

- » **Executors:** [Casa Fluminense](#), [FunBEA](#) (Brazilian Environmental Education Fund), [Baixada Maranhense Community Institute](#), [Procomum Institute](#), [ICOM](#) (Instituto Comunitário Grande Florianópolis), [Redes da Maré](#) and [Tabôa – Community Reinforcement](#).
- » **Initial funders and partners:** [Comuá Network](#)

# 5. how can international philanthropy and isp strengthen community philanthropy in brazil?

One of the major gaps and challenges to the strengthening of this agenda concerns funding, as there are still few philanthropic and ISP organizations supporting community and independent philanthropy.

Generally speaking, international organizations are the biggest donors to this field. In fact, the mapping of independent donor organizations executed by Comuá indicates that most of the mobilized resources come from international philanthropy (approximately 70% of the total). However, even in the case of international resources, there are still lots of barriers and limitations.

The study [The Trust Gap: The Troubling Lack of Direct, Flexible Funding for Human Rights in the Global South and East](#), developed by HRFN (Human Rights Funders Network) indicates that only 12% of all philanthropic resources earmarked for human rights from the Global North reach the Global South and East.

Although there is a group of international philanthropy funders (some with representation in Brazil) that support independent and community funds and the socio-environmental justice agendas, it remains clear that some donation practices are not aligned with the principles of community philanthropy.

The establishment of top-down community funds through the allocation of massive resources to movements and/or groups, many of which have little expertise in the field of philanthropy, grantmaking practices and institutional and financial management capacity, is one of the recent trends observed in the field.

Often, this form of investment, instead of solving the social problems it seeks to address, creates political and economic sustainability problems for these funds, which also impacts the field of independent and community philanthropy, calling into question its ability to act on its own and, consequently, instilling a sense of distrust.

It has also been noted that, albeit incipiently, some ISP organizations (especially family philanthropy) are supporting organizations that operate in the field of independent and community philanthropy.

The first step to strengthening community philanthropy is proposing the development of grantmaking actions to support civil society organizations and initiatives - directly and/or through independent local funds - based on the belief that they are who best understands

how to use the resources to generate social transformation in their territories. Supporting their institutional strengthening is paramount to these agendas.

Adopting community philanthropy practices implies a drastic change in the visions and forms of operation of philanthropic organizations. Supporting initiatives in the field and creating partnerships with independent philanthropy funds, fostering their institutional development or creating specific lines of support, are good ways to start a process of changing the forms of giving.

# credits

## community philanthropy in brazil: principles, practices and experiences

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