

Locally owned. Globally backed.

A Manifesto for Locally Led Action

We, Swiss NGOs and other organizations active in international cooperation, firmly believe that local actors* must take the lead in international cooperation to ensure that actions are just, effective, and sustainable. We recognize the underlying power imbalances, rooted in colonial and historically oppressive structures, which continue to stand in the way of truly equitable partnerships.

For these reasons, we strive for the following:

1 Ensuring local ownership

- We include our partners in all relevant decision-making processes and give support only when requested and needed.
- We accompany local actors with strategic, organizational, and financial support, enabling them to thrive as actors in their own right.
- We advocate for donor policies and framework conditions that allow and promote locally led action.

2 Building equitable partnerships

- We invest in long-term partnerships, nurturing a culture of mutual accountability.
- We prioritize co-creation and joint learning approaches in our collaboration with local actors.
- We take our share of financial, reputational and security risks to protect and empower our partners. At the same time, we commit to a fair and transparent sharing of resources.
- When direct implementation is unavoidable, we commit to taking all possible measures to ensure meaningful participation of local actors in decision-making and implementation.

4 Ensuring quality financing

- We prioritize long-term funding to strengthen partners.
- We cover overhead costs of local actors and engage in core funding, where it is in our own hands, and we advocate for it.
- We improve local actors' access to donors and step back if it serves the cause.
- We direct resources towards impactful actions and provide flexible reporting models to alleviate bureaucratic burdens. Where it is not in our own hands, we advocate for it.

3 Protecting civic space

- We champion human rights, justice, and the protection of human rights defenders.
- We invest in building trust and networks among national and international CSOs, NGOs, and donors for better coordination and joint advocacy.

5 Eliminating power imbalances

- We tackle power imbalances that hinder equal partnerships and sustainability, starting with dismantling structural racism and advancing gender equality in our own minds and organizations.
- We consistently apply ethical standards in our communication and fundraising, avoiding any paternalistic messaging based on stereotypes.

* Government bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia, community-based organizations and local authorities.

Swiss NGOs play a range of complementary roles, shaped by unique missions, values, and priorities:

Building bridges for lasting impact

through fostering collaboration, mutual learning processes, co-creation of knowledge and joint action.

Boosting smart and flexible funding

which allows partners to invest in institutional development and innovation.

Investing in sustainable partnerships

through trust-based, long-term collaborations grounded in shared values.

Acting as advocator and influencer

by engaging in development policy dialogues with decision-makers to promote evidence-based and impactful policies.

Taking risks and fostering innovation

through the support of local actors navigating risks such as shrinking civic space and limited resources, ensuring resilience and safety in challenging environments.

Sensitising for global responsibility

by raising awareness about Switzerland's role in global inequalities and the need for shared responsibility and solidarity.

As Swiss NGOs step up their commitment to rebalancing international cooperation by adapting practices, mobilising resources, and engaging key stakeholders, some of the commitments can only be achieved under the right enabling conditions. We therefore call on donors to align their funding and partnership practices with this shift in approach.

The signing organizations will:

- ... take the contents of the manifesto into account when revising their strategies, funding and partnership agreements.
- ... participate in peer learning with other signatory organizations.
- ... share their engagement on locally led action with their partner organizations.

List of signatory NGOs (February 2026)



Other signatory organizations

