RINGO Project: Phase 3

"Amplifying Majority Voices in Global Narratives"

Strategy 2025-2027: Executive Summary

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

The RINGO Project has emerged as a transformative force in fostering more equitable relationships across civil society, between international actors, and grassroots organisations from the majority world. Since its inception, the project has emphasised the importance of community building and system change processes to empower local actors and shift power dynamics within civil society. Recognising the unique challenges and opportunities faced by grassroots movements, the RINGO Project has consulted with various stakeholders, including participants from previous project phases and our broader community of members interested in advancing locally led development.

In the current global landscape, civic space, civic leadership, and active citizenship have gained increasing relevance. Civil society organisations (CSOs) often navigate shrinking civic spaces, which can stifle their ability to operate freely and engage effectively with communities. On the other hand, the current global civil society system, within which the INGOs, funders, and national CSOs operate, is no longer fit for purpose. There is, however, an emergent systemic transformation to a more equitable and sustainable relationship in resource flows, partnerships, risk-sharing, leadership, governance, and accountability between local and international actors. Nonetheless, the progress is much slower than expected due to lack of will and inertia of institutions and funders both at the majority and minority world. **The RINGO Project seeks to accelerate the transformation through active engagement with all actors across the system.** In particular, it places the voices and leadership of actors from the majority world at the centre, fostering an environment that supports active citizenship and empowers communities to drive their own development agenda.

Phase III of the **RINGO Project emphasises partnerships and community building as essential components for advancing systemic change.** We have already demonstrated success in nurturing connections among initiatives, movements, and sector leaders that enable agile coordination to apply pressure at critical moments and amplify radical voices advocating for change. For example, RINGO is currently partnering with Peace Direct to advance the decolonisation conversation in West Africa and the majority world at large. We also have a close

collaborative relationship with the ACAPACA, previously Sherwood Way in Latin America, Shift the Power movement and the Pledge for Change initiative to advance transformation by different actors in the system. This collaborative approach strengthens alliances and nurtures a collective identity among change agents committed to redefining the role of international NGOs (INGOs) as well as organisations in the global majority in supporting grassroots organisations and movements to thrive.

OUR WORK

Since 2021, the RINGO project has committed efforts towards transformation and re-imagining the role of INGOs using different approaches and strategies. Our vision is to catalyse the transformation of INGOs to become open and equitable vehicles for global solidarity.

Our core team comprises the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) as the institutional host for RINGO, with oversight of the project, team coordination, and financial management. The core team is formed of senior leadership from WACSI (Nana Afadzinu, Charles Kojo Vandyck, Jimm Chick, Nancy Kankam Kusi), alongside independent consultants with deep experience in the sector (Deborah Doane, Jennie Richmond, Janet Mawiyoo and Sparkle Richards). Reos Partners, experts in systems, change facilitation, formally joined the core team, and continue to co-design this work and lead on process and facilitation.

In our first phase, we convened an incredible community of changemakers in our Social Lab and allies of 55 (growing to 95) individuals from across civil society, globally, and all striving to find innovative ways to shift power to challenge the purpose, structures, and position of INGOs' dominant place in civil society within the development and humanitarian space. We made significant progress and launched a portfolio of prototypes. We rounded up our Learning Festival at the end of 2022, and we knew - and were repeatedly told - that our work was not done.

In 2023, we launched our second phase, leveraging our strengths and access to decision-makers to focus our efforts on influencing those in genuine positions of power. Alongside the ongoing prototyping work, our voices from the south research studies and community gatherings, we ran two Action Pods specifically targeting two primary stakeholders: INGO Boards and funders.

We will launch a significant set of resources and learning to round up our first two phases of work early in 2025, focusing on our prototypes and wider learning, and how they can be embedded in the system.

In the final quarter of this second phase, the RINGO core team came together to reflect on the transition. We celebrated our achievements while critically examining what we could have done differently, and analysed the current state of the ecosystem. Through the RINGO system change survey, we gathered valuable insights from 130 respondents: 40% from the majority world and 60% from the minority world. The survey highlighted RINGO's contribution to the internal transformation of organisations in areas such as resource flows, partnerships, risk sharing, transparency and accountability, ways of working, and leadership and governance. We also

invited members of the RINGO Social Lab to join our strategy development and share their experiences with the process and their thoughts on the future direction.

These reflections, along with the insights gained from our work, clarified where we should focus our energy in phase three of RINGO, and confirmed the ongoing demand for our work. These inputs form the foundation of the phase three strategy.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED THUS FAR

Though there are common experiences that local organisations have of working with INGOs and other international actors, each region experiences unique challenges and opportunities faced by civil society. Therefore, each context requires tailored approaches and strategies to address the different obstacles and barriers. **For example, we found that experiences in Latin America and Asia differ significantly from those in Africa, and the opportunities they present for change also vary.**

We also learned that change arises when we address, empower, and amplify both the supply and demand sides of our work, recognising that lasting change needs to find its footing from the grassroots level. This approach fosters ownership and ensures that developed solutions are relevant and sustainable. Although RINGO has sought to be globally inclusive, we have not yet had the capacity to tailor our work to regional needs, except for some small prototyping groups.

Furthermore, we understand **the importance of nurturing partnerships, strengthening alliances, and working with movements.** These elements are essential for changing mindsets and sustaining long-term impact. Collaborative efforts enable organisations and individuals to share resources, knowledge, and experiences, ultimately leading to a more unified and powerful response to the challenges they face.

Our RINGO community and social lab have emerged as vital ambassadors for system change. They play an instrumental role in cultivating a critical mass of changemakers and fostering an environment in which innovative ideas can flourish. Through their efforts, we are witnessing the emergence of RINGO “ideas”, fed from the sector, being embedded into multiple networks that not only facilitate collaboration but also inspire more demonstrated commitments to change and shifting power. This collective strength is invaluable as we continue to navigate the complexities of our work and strive for a more just and equitable society.

WHAT ARE OUR STRENGTHS?

Our community has told us that RINGO serves as a **catalyst**, **connector**, **refiner**, and **enhancer** across various parts of the system, significantly amplifying our collective influence. Having established a strong brand and identity among INGOs, funders, and local actors, RINGO has gained credibility, positioning it to have a substantial impact on the sector. This credibility

allows us to create space for collaboration and act as a key connector with other system change initiatives, strengthening efforts to shift power dynamics within civil society.

The RINGO Phase 3 strategy was developed through careful reflection on our transition, drawing from research, lessons learned, and an honest evaluation of both strengths and weaknesses. We have also incorporated valuable input from key partners, allies, and respondents into the system change survey. These insights have shaped our approach, ensuring that our strategy is informed by collective wisdom and grounded in the realities of the system that we aim to transform.

OUR STRATEGY FOR PHASE 3

VISION: Our 10-year (2020-2030) vision remains the same: *we seek a more equitable and sustainable civil society in which power and resources are shared equitably*.

MAIN PURPOSE*: Our main purpose is to focus on a reimagined global civil society, where INGOs shift away from being the dominant actor in the system and take on a more supportive, solidaristic role. We want to support majority world actors to revolutionise their role and take the driver's seat within civil society*.

CORE ROLE*: Our new strategy will focus on supporting our existing regional community and building out this community to influence, catalyse, and innovate the systems that shape the work of civil society with global majority actors.*

HOW WE WILL DO THIS:

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- **Expand and nurture the RINGO Community at the regional level:** Focus will be placed on building and nurturing our community across various geographies, regions, and among different power holders and actors. The aim is to strengthen the decolonising and #shiftthepower movements and inspire practical, lasting actions. This includes organising RINGO community gatherings, both physically and virtually, and in different regions. Partnerships with regional allies, networks, and movements will be leveraged to enhance the reach in each region. An example is the partnership with ACAPACA in Latin America, which has already adapted RINGO's lessons and approaches of RINGO within the Latin America community.

- **Maximise the impact of RINGO's learning and practices on organisations and the broader system:** We intend to focus on documenting and sharing knowledge from our regional and global convenings, innovations, and prototypes with INGOs, funders, decision-makers, and organisations within the civil society sector. This will include creating a repository of comprehensive case studies, best practices, and knowledge for

collective advocacy and policy influencing driving system change and improving practices across the civil society sector.

- **Nurture spaces for innovation through support for embedding and scaling prototypes:** We aim to set up a dedicated fund to provide grants and non-financial support to pilot and invest in new ideas while creating spaces for testing, documenting, and sharing insights from our prototypes and other innovations to promote continuous learning and finally, for scaling and embedding our prototypes. There is a growing demand to adopt and implement many of our prototypes, from the Reverse Call for Proposals to negotiated risk, however, these require ongoing support to refine them, ensure they are taken up by the system.

CORE ACTIVITIES (scaled according to resources)

- **Strengthened regional partnerships for convenings and collective advocacy and influence**: To advance our work in each region, we will strategically identify and partner with key initiatives and conveners in each region to implement RINGO work. Currently, we have already established partnerships with the ACAPACA to replicate this in Latin America and other allies, networks, and movements such as the Pledge for Change, Shift the Power Movement, and the Dev Hub program. We will identify new national networks and movements and build solidarity to expand collective efforts more broadly.

  We will also continue to advocate where opportunities arise, such as through the OECD DAC, funding forums (eg. Skoll, African Philanthropy Network and Forums), and more.

- **Organise regional and online global gatherings**: We will organise a quarterly RINGO regional community gathering and Open House in various formats (virtual and/or in-person) and, organise one global physical convening to connect partnerships with other system change initiatives, movements, and networks, including our newly emergent regional networks. Through these gatherings, we will share insights and learn from within RINGO and other system change initiatives working across global civil society to influence change across the sector.

- **Test, trial, and gather insights from the prototypes and other learnings from the system*:*** We will create avenues for testing and piloting new and existing prototypes. We intend to capture, document, and share learning from existing prototypes and other system change initiatives in different formats with our INGOs, funders, CSOs, networks, and movements for advocacy and collective influence to advance embedding, adaption, use, and application of these practices at the global, regional, and national levels.

- **Create a RINGO Innovation Support Fund for Embedding*:*** We will set up a subgrant mechanism to support innovations annually with some seed fund and other additional resources and non-financial support, including coaching and mentoring, to

strengthen the capacity of host organisations and innovation teams to embed innovation in their institutional programmes.

EVOLVING OUR WORK

It is important to note that RINGO works iteratively and flexibly to respond to emergent opportunities as well as to meet the needs of our community. We don't believe in 'projectising' but rather providing the space and skills to facilitate change. The strategy presented here will evolve to meet the needs of our stakeholders, and of course can be adapted depending on resources secured.

WHAT CHANGES DO WE WANT TO SEE

- Growing uptake of practical initiatives to genuinely shift power.

- A more vibrant and active community of civil society organisations, networks, and movements from various regions and sectors in the majority world, agile to take on more significant leadership roles within the system and influence INGOs and their relationships with global civil society.

- Stronger complementarity between the different Shift the Power Initiatives.

- Demonstrated commitment from funders, INGOs, and organisations to develop and design tailored system change approaches to address the unique obstacles and barriers reflected in the needs and experiences of each region.

TIMELINE

The strategy will be implemented over **3 years.**