

Change starts locally

TUNAFASI was founded in 2019 by Betteke de Gaay Fortman, a changemaker with decades of experience in bottom-up development, disability inclusion, and social justice. She saw the deep potential of bottom-up system change initiatives, and the limitations of the more traditional, top-down development aid.

One of the moments that inspired the founding of TUNAFASI was in 2018, when Betteke was approached by Gilbert Mututsi, director of the Congolese NGO ADED. He wanted to learn how to reach children and youth with disabilities in a sustainable way within his own community in Uvira, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Inspired by his drive, Betteke encouraged him to visit the Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation Program (DPRP) of Karuna Foundation in Nepal, a program she had co-created during her years with Karuna Foundation from 2007 until 2019. This program aims to improve the quality of life of children with disabilities and their families, and to prevent avoidable disabilities by strengthening government health systems and empowering communities, with a clear exit strategy and local ownership from the very beginning. When Gilbert returned, he told Betteke:

“After ten days in Nepal, I’ve learned how to move forward for the next ten years in my own country.”

This moment marked the beginning of our commitment to support local leadership and grassroots organisations; built on shared ambitions, mutual trust, and a clear exit strategy from the start to ensure bottom-up system change.

Who we are

“We can’t develop others, we develop ourselves” – Joseph Ki-Zerbo

TUNAFASI is a Dutch organisation that supports local leaders and grassroots organisations working with the most marginalized communities, in low-income and conflict-affected contexts. These are the communities most overlooked by existing systems, where needs are greatest, and where the smallest shift from within can spark lasting change. Because sustainable systems that include the most marginalized work for everyone.

TUNAFASI catalyses local ownership from the conviction that true development comes from the efforts and responsibility of a community itself, rather than from outside. Our role is intentionally small and time-limited: we support until we are no longer needed.



*Photo: Children with and without disabilities in Uvira
©ADED.*

TUNAFASI Principles

Everything we do is guided by our four core principles:

- **Locally-led:** The actual work is done by our grassroots partners. They take strategic decisions and implement accordingly. Together, we identify where TUNAFASI's support adds most value.
- **Trust-based:** Partnerships are built on trust, respect, and shared responsibility. That means honest and open conversations about our collaboration, also when things don't go as predicted.
- **Exit-ready:** We agree upfront when our support ends, and how the program is sustained without external support. We call this our exit strategy.
- **Leaving no one behind:** We specifically support the most marginalized communities, in the most vulnerable countries. These are the communities most overlooked by existing systems, where needs are greatest, and where the smallest shift from within can spark lasting change. Because sustainable systems that include the most marginalized work for everyone.

Impact in practice:

The Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation Program (DPRP) approach is where TUNAFASI's roots lie. Started in Nepal, now scaled to DR Congo, Kenya, and Tanzania; built together with a network of different grassroots organisations and funders. DPRP is a practical example that a community-led approach to disability prevention and rehabilitation can work, scale, and reach sustainable system change.

However, the TUNAFASI principles are not exclusive to DPRP. At its core, it means working alongside local leaders and strengthening what communities and systems already know or do. Whether they are navigating disability, climate change, or other forms of marginalisation. Which is why we also support other local leaders with network and linking to champion bottom-up system change programs.



Photo: Inclusive Games Day of children with & without disabilities in Uvira, DR Congo ©ADED.

DPRP in DRC: Through our partners ADED and AJEPAD, 4.000+ children with disabilities and their families were reached. 130.000 mothers gained access to better care. More public resources are now structurally directed toward disability and prevention.



Photo: members of Pastoral Women's Council in North-West Tanzania ©PWC.

Bottom-up system-change in Kenya and Tanzania: IMPACT and Pastoral Women's Council champion indigenous communities-led resilience on securing land rights, strengthening sustainable livelihoods, nurturing ecosystems, and advancing rights of women and girls.

What we've learned, and why we share it

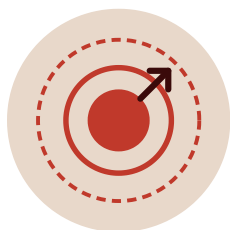
International development has made progress over the decades, and yet the power dynamics that shape how decisions are made, and by whom, have shifted more in language than in practice. Needs are still too often defined from the outside, solutions designed without communities, and when funding ends, too little tends to remain.

TUNAFASI works from a different starting point, not because we have better answers, but because we believe the answers are often already there, in the knowledge, relationships and leadership of grassroots organisations and communities themselves.

The three modules in this series - on locally led development, trust-based partnership, and exit strategy - are not a framework. They are the insights and lessons we have gathered alongside the people we have worked with in Nepal, Bangladesh, the DRC, Kenya and Tanzania.

We share these lessons with (I)NGOs, philanthropists and foundations in a spirit of honest reflection because we believe progress comes from learning together, openly and honestly.

What's in this series



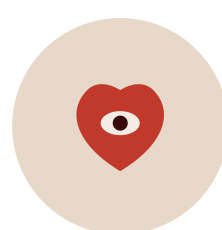
Module 1 - Exit Strategy:

Why planning for a sustainable exit from the start is the foundation of every successful intervention.



Module 2 - Locally Led

Development: What it means for leadership to be genuinely rooted in the local context, and why it matters.



Module 3 - Trust-Based

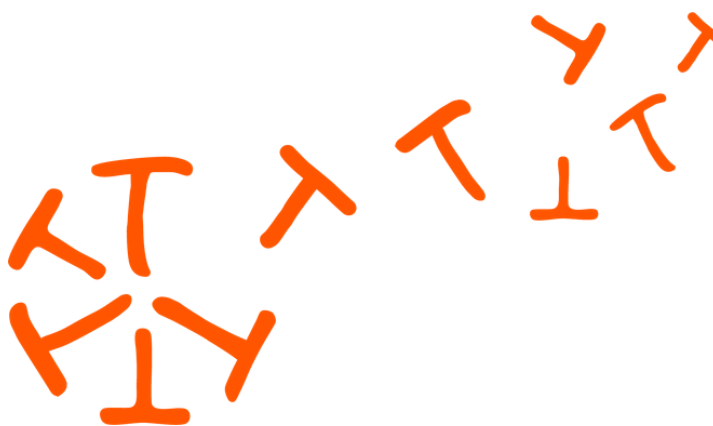
Partnership: How to build collaborations grounded in mutual trust, respect, and shared responsibility.

Get in touch

Want to learn, exchange or explore this further in your own context?

We would love to bring these ideas to life in conversation with you. TUNAFASI offers workshops on one, several, or all of the modules in this series.

Contact us: info@tunafasi.com



These modules were developed with the insights and contributions of Betteke de Gaay Fortman (TUNAFASI), Gilbert Mututsi (ADED, DRC), Malih Ole Kaunga (IMPACT, Kenya), Yogendra Bhattarai (Karuna, Nepal), and Maanda Ngoitiko (PWC, Tanzania). We are grateful for their knowledge, expertise, and willingness to share.