



African Society for
Social & Behaviour Change

2025 Symposium Comprehensive Report

Theme:

Navigating the Funding Crisis – Adapting and
Innovating for Sustainable SBC Programming

28th August 2025



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Executive Summary

On 28th August 2025, the African Society for Social and Behaviour Change (ASSBC) gathered almost 300 participants from across the continent for a virtual symposium titled: 'Navigating the Funding Crisis - Adapting and Innovating for Sustainable SBC Programming.' The event served as both a wake-up call and a call to action. With donor support diminishing, the symposium provided a platform to share hard truths, bold ideas, and hopeful solutions.

What stood out most was the shared understanding that Africa cannot keep doing things the same way. Aid cuts have been damaging, yes, but they have also created opportunities for innovation, local leadership, and new approaches to financing change. Participants left with a renewed sense of urgency, practical recommendations, and a plan for making SBC more resilient, locally owned, and effective.

The symposium fostered a commitment to decolonizing development thinking. Speakers consistently challenged the dominant aid dependency paradigm,

advocating instead for locally owned, community-driven approaches that emphasise African agency and self-determination.

The discussions went beyond technical aspects of funding mechanisms to explore fundamental questions about mindset, narrative ownership, and the transformation of power dynamics in development practice.



“Aid constraints are real, but Africa cannot shoehorn long-term change into short-term aid cycles”

– Prof. Ali Awni



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Background and Rationale

The funding landscape for SBC in Africa has changed significantly. For decades, many programmes depended on international aid, with USAID and European donors playing especially important roles.

However, recent freezes and cuts have pulled billions from programmes, leaving over 70 initiatives in East and West Africa struggling to survive. The impact has been stalled projects, demoralised staff, and communities asking why support always disappears so quickly.

This symposium was convened to reassess how Africa funds and sustains SBC. It provided a platform for practitioners, policymakers, and donors to review funding approaches and

collaboratively develop practical strategies. The aim was to align governments, donors, implementers, and communities to focus on effective strategies that endure beyond donor cycles.

The objectives of the symposium were to identify donor priorities, critically evaluate financing models, showcase adaptable strategies, and collaboratively establish design principles for sustainable SBC implementation.



About the Society

The African Society for Social and Behavior Change (AS-SBC) is a continental network of professionals and organizations advancing Social and Behavior Change (SBC) for development across Africa.

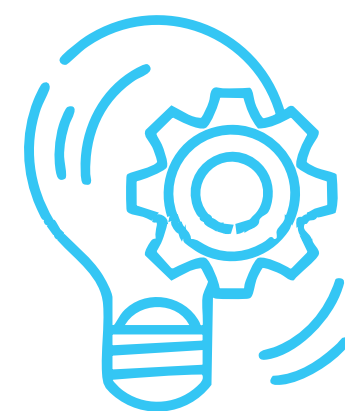
The Society brings together practitioners, researchers, and institutions to promote excellence, collaboration, and learning in SBC practice.

AS-SBC envisions a respected community of SBC professionals that sets the African SBC agenda, advances the discipline globally, and drives positive social transformation.

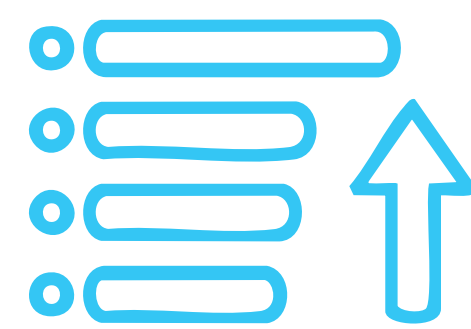
Its mission is to strengthen SBC practice in Africa through capacity building, networking, knowledge sharing, and recognition of excellence.

Strategic Focus

Guided by its 2023–2028 Strategic Plan, AS-SBC focuses on:



Enhancing members' technical competence.



Shaping SBC priorities and standards across Africa.



Promoting systems for knowledge exchange and resource sharing.



Strengthening its institutional capacity.

Membership and Reach

With chapters in 16 countries and representation in 35 African nations (and members from over 50 countries worldwide), AS-SBC provides a platform for peer learning and professional growth.

The Society has organized more than 25 learning events to foster knowledge exchange and mentorship.

Partnerships

AS-SBC collaborates with leading institutions including Makerere University, the University of the Witwatersrand, and national governments such as Uganda's Ministry of Health.

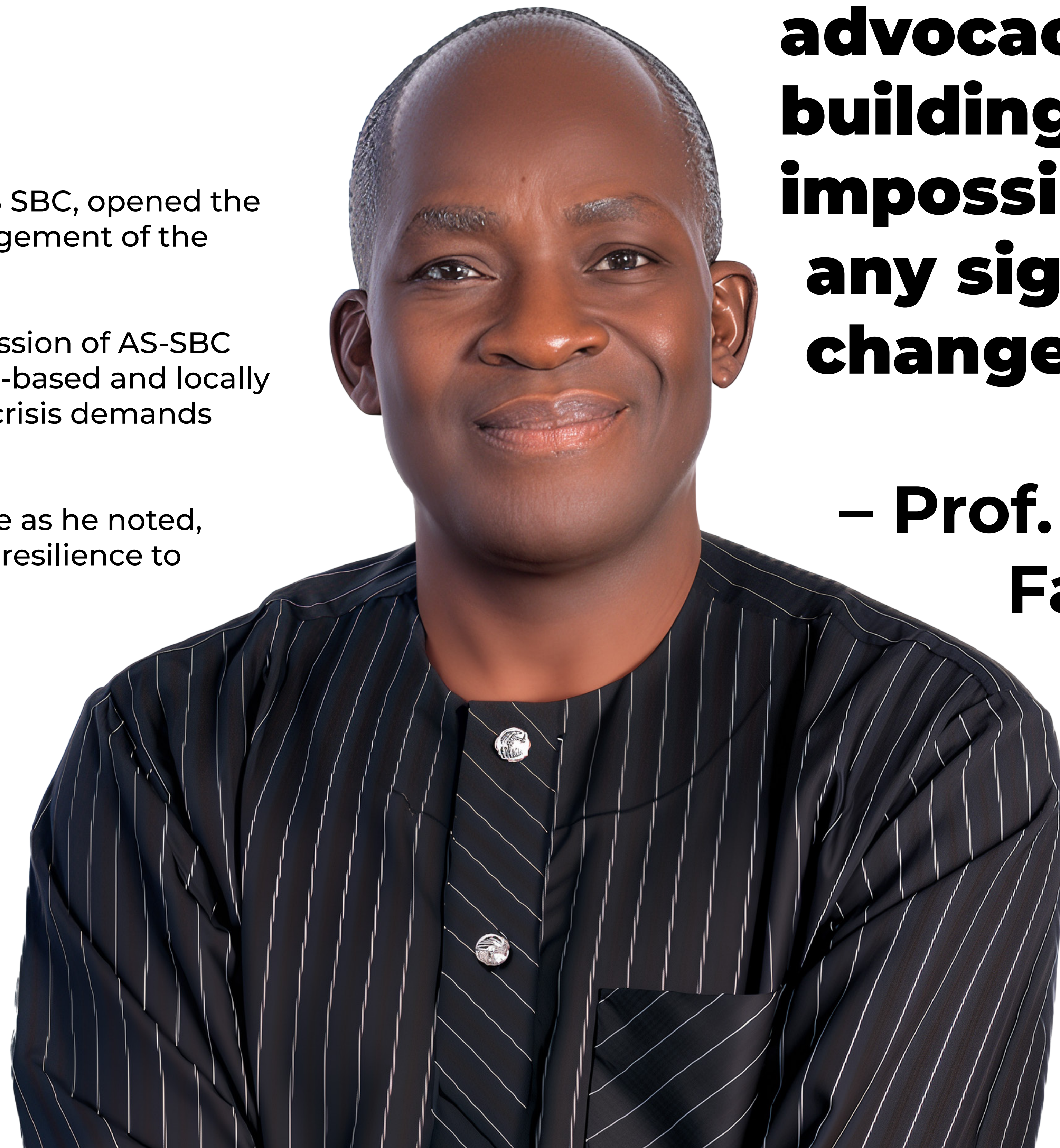
It is an active member of the Global Alliance for SBC, contributing to global policy, knowledge management, and advocacy. Through its expanding network and partnerships, AS-SBC continues to shape Africa's SBC agenda and amplify African expertise in global development dialogue.

Opening Remarks

Prof. Adebayo Fayoyin, Chair of the AS SBC, opened the symposium with a candid acknowledgement of the challenge ahead.

He reminded participants that the mission of AS-SBC has always been to promote evidence-based and locally owned SBC, but the current funding crisis demands urgent adaptation.

He spoke with a firm and hopeful tone as he noted, “Africa, he said, has the creativity and resilience to chart its own path forward.”



“...without strategic advocacy and coalition building, it is almost impossible to achieve any significant change”

– Prof. Adebayo Fayoyin



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Keynote Address: The Road Ahead

The keynote speaker, Prof. Ali Awni, set the tone for the day. He argued that although aid has played an important role, it was never intended to be permanent.

He urged the audience to stop forcing Africa's long-term ambitions into short-term donor timelines. He emphasised that behaviour change is a long journey; it cannot be hurried to fit a 2-year project grant.

Prof. Awni went further, questioning the hidden agendas behind aid, "Nobody gives you money for free," he said. "And most probably, their agenda is different from yours."

This somewhat honest reminder struck a chord with participants, reinforcing the need for Africa to control its own narrative and financing models.



“Nobody gives you money for free. And most probably, their agenda is different from yours.”

Prof. Ali Awni



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Beyond the Headlines: Storytelling in Development

BBC journalist and broadcaster Alan Kasujja followed with a lively, no-nonsense talk about how Africa tells its development stories or fails to. He critiqued the lack of authentic African narratives in global media and pointed out that too often, jargon and technical language lock stories inside boardrooms.

‘You talk about stakeholders and benchmarks, but the average person and even journalists like me don’t understand what you mean,’ he said.

Kasujja urged the audience to concentrate on genuine human stories. Not a million-pound grant, but a woman in Malawi protecting herself from HIV.

Not project statistics, but young people in Zimbabwe finding mental health support by sitting on a simple wooden bench. “Those are the stories that move people,” he argued, and those are the stories that will inspire investment.



“Tell your own stories. Stop waiting for CNN or the BBC... You are your own saviour.”

– Alan Kasujja



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Interactive Poll: Community Reflections

Hippolyte Rouamba facilitated a live Mentimeter poll to gather participant reflections.

When asked which words best described the impact of funding cuts, responses such as 'uncertainty,' frustration,' and 'loss of trust' were prevalent.

Many emphasised that communities crave continuity, long-term support, and familiar faces, rather than endless cycles of short-term projects.



Rethinking Funding Models, A Panel Discussion



Stephanie Thorland

from the Global Alliance shared donor insights. She emphasised that while SBC remains important, donors are unlikely to fund it in isolation.

Instead, SBC must be incorporated into larger projects that align with donors' current priorities, including health, climate resilience, gender equality, and governance. She urged practitioners to demonstrate outcomes, integrate with broader systems, and diversify funding sources.

Dr. Sara Jewett,

an academic from South Africa, reflected on structural issues within the aid system. She criticized the 'three-year funding for a five-year project addressing a twenty-year problem' approach.

She explained how externally led projects often undermine community trust, fragment actors, and distort human resources by creating unsustainable salary structures. She emphasised that organisations that succeed after funding cuts are those rooted in community, with adaptive mindsets and strong value propositions.



Nana Agyei,

CEO of Black Star Brokerage (BSB) Limited in Ghana, offered a private sector perspective. He highlighted innovative financing mechanisms such as impact investing, diaspora bonds, municipal assets, and green bonds that could support SBC.

He reminded the audience that not all investors are altruistic, but many aim to highlight lives they have touched. By aligning commercial interests with social outcomes, SBC can attract new sources of capital.



“It is not necessarily about funding cuts. It is about the spirit of ‘I can do it myself, from my own resources.’”

– Nana Agye



Country-Level Breakout Discussions

Participants then divided into country-level groups to reflect on how the funding crisis was impacting their contexts and to suggest practical adaptations.

Discussions highlighted striking similarities across different settings, mentioning: disrupted continuity, pressure on NGOs, and governments struggling to bridge funding gaps.

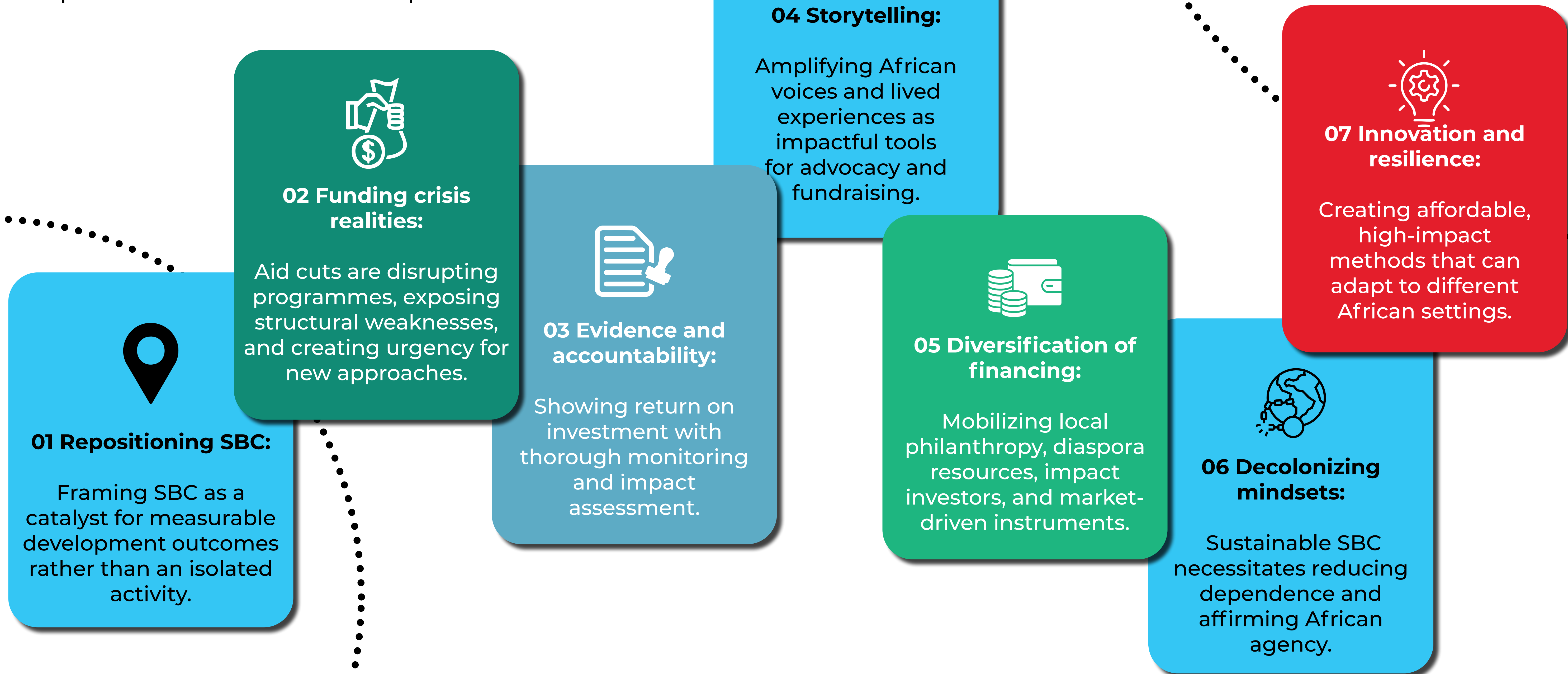
However, some creative solutions emerged. Some country chapters recommended working with local businesses and microfinance institutions, while others proposed engaging faith-based networks or redirecting diaspora remittances into structured community funds.

A common theme was the need to integrate SBC into government health and education systems, so it becomes part of everyday structures, rather than an external addition.



Emerging Themes and Insights

The symposium identified seven interlinked themes as critical pillars for a resilient SBC roadmap:



Key Recommendations and Roadmap

Participants formulated a set of practical recommendations to guide SBC programming going forward.



Diversify funding portfolios with diaspora bonds, CSR, taxes on harmful products, micro-donations, and blended finance.



Make storytelling and narrative shift to the core of SBC advocacy and fundraising strategies.



Improve evidence generation by focusing on outcomes and impact measurement.



Invest in local capacity and leadership to minimize reliance on external actors.



Integrate SBC into national development plans, sectoral policies, and government service delivery frameworks



Enhance multi-sectoral collaborations, including the private sector, civil society, and academia



Build coalitions and joint advocacy platforms to amplify voices and share resources.



Summary and Closing

Wassihun Belay Melaku synthesized the deliberations, consolidating recurring themes such as funding realities, mindset change, repositioning SBC, diversification, evidence, and storytelling.

He proposed a joint communiqué to formalise the findings into design principles and immediate actions.

Closing the symposium, Barbara Davies, the Ghana Chapter Lead, encouraged participants to take ownership of the roadmap and turn discussions into action.

“The symposium closes,” she said, “but the real work begins here.”



“...we don’t run projects. We run long term Solutions. That is what SBC is about...”

– Barbara Davies



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Conclusion

The 2025 ASSBC Symposium offered an optimistic view for Africa's SBC community. It revealed the vulnerabilities of aid reliance but also the remarkable creativity within Africa to forge its own path. Participants left with a sense of urgency and hope, recognizing that solutions are within reach.

If Africa adopts innovation, collaboration, and genuine storytelling, SBC will not only withstand the funding crisis but also become stronger and more sustainable than before.

By addressing the realities of aid withdrawal and rethinking sustainable approaches, participants crafted a new plan for sustainability and independence.

As Prof. Ali Awni reminded, "Aid constraints are real, but Africa cannot shoehorn long-term change into short-term aid cycles." Together, these insights highlight the urgency and potential of African-led SBC transformation.

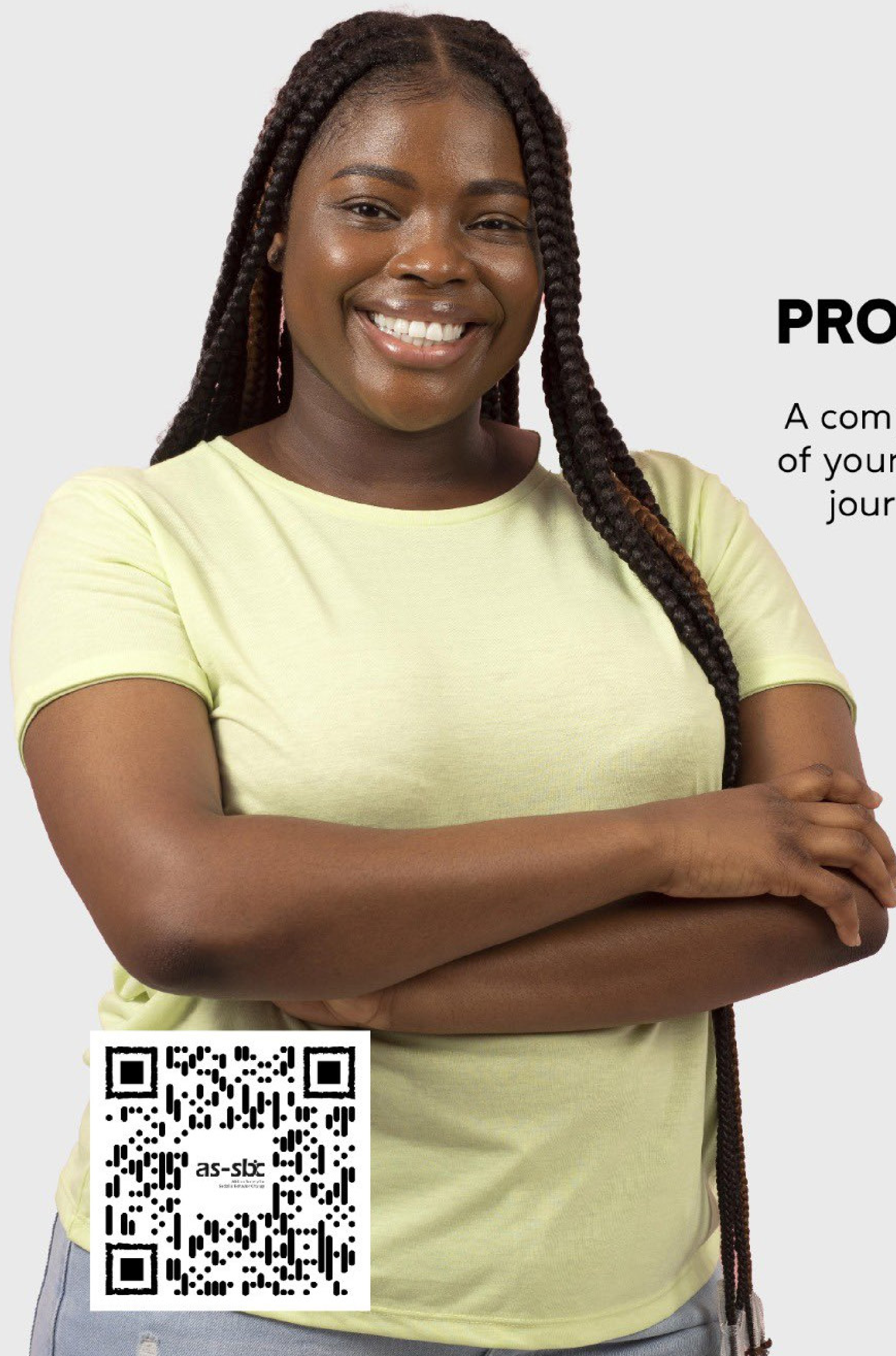
The roadmap created through extensive dialogue and collaborative analysis offers practical guidance for practitioners, governments, and funders dedicated to strengthening SBC ecosystems across Africa.

More importantly, it highlights the collective wisdom and inventive capacity that arise when African voices are at the centre of discussions about their own development priorities and strategies.

As participants return to their respective contexts to implement these insights, they were encouraged to carry with them not only specific recommendations and strategies but also renewed confidence in African capabilities and a transformed understanding of what sustainable development can look like when it emerges from community priorities and indigenous resources.

The symposium's legacy will be measured not in the documents it produced but in the transformed practices and relationships it catalyzed across the continent.





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