

NEAR



Strategic Plan
2021-2023

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The humanitarian and development sectors are at a crossroads. We have a unique opportunity at NEAR, to bring about transformative change to the aid sector by influencing complex policy conversations while working alongside our members in developing concrete solutions. This Strategic Plan was developed with our members' intention to seize this historic opportunity for real systemic change.

The **Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR)** is a growing collective of local and national organizations working to improve the daily lives of their communities through humanitarian response, peace building and development. NEAR started as a movement of Global South leaders at the World Humanitarian Summit articulating their challenges within the aid sector. It quickly ballooned to a network of ninety-six founding leaders across the Global South committed to advocate for systemic change in the international humanitarian and development aid system.

Amid an ever-changing environment, NEAR has embraced its role as both a representative of Global South actors, and as a convener of ideas and solutions, grounded in the knowledge, experience and culture of its members.

Through an open participatory process NEAR was able to listen to its members' needs and aspirations for the next three years, and to clearly identify its future role through two main bodies of work: **Influencing** and **Innovative Practice**. NEAR is excited to progress into a network that convenes, exchanges, and learns with Global South leaders to reinvent aid.



NEAR's greatest value to its members has been its authentic moral strength in advocacy, shifting the power to the global south

NEAR's Mandate

As a network of diverse local and national organizations throughout the Global South, it was imperative for NEAR as a collective to clearly explain its vision, mission, and values. As a nascent and innovative network, we have worked with our members to express what we believe, how we work, and ultimately how we define ourselves.

NEAR Vision:

A world where local communities have the resources and agency to address the challenges that impact them.

NEAR Mission:

We are a Global South network of local civil society organizations reinventing aid through innovative ideas, knowledge sharing, and influencing.



NEAR Values

NEAR is rooted in its values. The following set of values express our way of working, our mission, and really represent NEAR's membership of community actors.

Humanity beyond identity: We bring “humanity back to humanitarianism” by focusing solely on people and making sure that humanitarian and development responses go directly to the people in need.

Inclusiveness: We recognize the powerful role played by local communities in times of crisis and in development. We want to ensure that silenced voices are heard, and that resources and partnerships are equitable and dignified.

Agency and Dignity: We believe local people can and should shape humanitarian and development responses with their own ideas, values, lifestyles, preferences, needs, abilities and desires.

Credibility and Mutual Accountability: We are determined to increase genuine accountability to affected communities, donors and the public by making the delivery of local and international humanitarian and development responses more transparent.

Independence: While we depend on support of our partners and donors, we act independently of outside influences. Our leading light is the vision and mission of this network.



NEAR Definition of Global South Local Organization

NEAR has clearly defined a local and/or national organization, which may include a community-based organization, a non-governmental or civil society organization, as well as a Southern Regional/Cross-Border Organization. Each of these groups are defined by the following criteria:

- Present in locations before, during, and after a crisis
- Accountable to local laws
- Accountable to communities where they are based
- Are not internationally affiliated in terms of branding, governance, or financing (that results from that affiliation)



Background

Social Movement to Network

At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, there was a consistent message of ‘frustration from Southern Governments and local organizations who struggle to be seen by the international community as the primary agents of response and to access resources, and feel their governance and coordination structures are pushed aside by international actors rather than respected and strengthened.’ It was here – at the Summit – that NEAR was officially launched by ninety-six Global South leaders. The idea was broad at the onset: to create a vibrant and influential network of civil society actors from the Global South. NEAR was immediately successful in meeting its initial goals. Recognizing the need to localize aid, the Summit adopted the Grand Bargain Agreement, which included a target that NEAR’s founding members lobbied hard to include. This was the commitment of funders and international organizations “to provide **25% of all humanitarian funding directly to local and national responders by 2020**”. NEAR also became active in the Grand Bargain’s localization workstream, challenging definitions for who can be considered a local organization. NEAR became the first signatory of the Grand Bargain from the Global South and remained so until end of 2020.

NEAR went on to spend its early years developing itself as a network and defining its strategic priorities. In this period, NEAR focused much of its attention on holding international NGOs, UN agencies and donors accountable to their Grand Bargain

commitments, including the development of a key tool called the Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF) to facilitate measuring progress. This tool, which aims to measure true capacity, is increasingly accepted in a wider range of contexts and with a variety of stakeholders. Today, the application for the LPMF continues to spread, underscoring international actors and local organizations’ commitment to better localize aid.

NEAR has significantly evolved and matured since its founding in 2016. NEAR is an active participant in several global processes, the primary one being the Localization Workstream of the Grand Bargain. NEAR is a Co-Chair of the Global Protection Cluster Advocacy Task Team – an unprecedented leadership role for the Global South within the Global cluster system. As a representative of the Global South, and often the only representative at the table representing Global South civil society, NEAR has engaged in policy discussions on a range of global, regional and national panels. Some of these engagements have been at the highest levels of the humanitarian structure. Perhaps the greatest testament to NEAR’s evolution as a network, **NEAR is routinely engaged and consulted as a voice for localization and the Global South**. We believe this is getting us one step closer to executing our values of equity amongst humanitarian and development actors.

External Factors Shaping the Network

Key trends in the sector shape our challenges and opportunities, and thus have influenced our strategic planning for the coming years.

NEAR believes that the moment is ripe to bring about real change in the aid system. In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement, debates on decolonizing aid, and the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the inequalities, contradictions and structural problems that have long underpinned international humanitarian action. In particular, first responders to COVID-19 in the Global South – local and national actors – continued to be systematically last in a long supply chain to receive funding to carry out their critical work, and almost never have a seat at decision-making tables, locally, regionally nor globally. Moreover, Black Lives Matter movement has ignited a serious conversation about the architecture of the aid system and how it has perpetuated inequalities. For NEAR, this was an opportunity to convene meaningful discussions around the topic of power and where it may lie in the aid sector.

This strategic plan is launched at a moment of fundamental questions in the aid world. What should the new aid system look like? How can we rethink the way the world responds to crises in this time of disruption? As international aid reaches operational, financial, and ethical limits, how can we insert voices from the front line, the voices of NEAR, to bring about reform and positive change?

While we begin our journey forward, the world is experiencing record numbers of natural disasters. Typhoons, cyclones and hurricanes are having a more profound impact on communities across the globe than at any period of our modern human history. Conflict and war are leaving record numbers of civilians displaced, forcing them to consider dangerous migration options. The demand for appropriate and transformative aid to our fellow human beings has never been more pressing.



NEAR Approach & Reform

From Local to Global: Input from NEAR's Membership

NEAR members have profoundly contributed to this planning process and in identifying its strategic priorities for 2023.

Key highlights of NEAR's consultations were:

- NEAR's members engage in humanitarian, development, and rights-based work. These form the "nexus" that the international community is looking for.
- NEAR's membership is evenly split in size in six categories ranging from those with an annual budget of under \$50,000 to the largest at over \$5 million.
- NEAR's members highlight the network's "moral strength", and "authentic leadership" as part of its strength in representing their localization ambitions.
- NEAR membership would like to secure genuine commitments from the international aid community to equitably share resources and risk,
- NEAR's members seek to enhance communications amongst their peers throughout the world.
- NEAR members see the greatest challenge as "changing the aid system in a post-COVID-19 world."
- As challenges, members believe that their potential is also hindered by a lack of resources at home - some face blockages by governments and their own lack of coordinated action and leadership.

As the **core organizing principle of its work**, NEAR members reaffirmed their commitment to two themes that have become priorities for NEAR for the period 2021-2023. The members

want NEAR to (1) **influence the sector**, while (2) **facilitating practical and innovative solutions that build on the experience and knowledge of the Global South**.

NEAR Reform: From Four Pillars to Two Organizing Principles

At its inception, NEAR set its focus on four pillars: Advocacy, Innovative Financing, Organizational Development, and Evidence-Based Research. These pillars were developed with an idea of increasing humanitarian and development financing to Global South actors while addressing the assumed lack of systems and capacity of local actors. NEAR successfully worked under these pillars and made significant achievements. Now, as part of this strategic planning process, it has the opportunity to fine tune and enhance its focus for the future.

NEAR began its strategy planning process by conducting an anonymous survey with its membership, followed by a set of consultative meetings and in-depth focus groups. The participating members were then engaged to review and provide feedback to the identified strategic priorities, to ensure it was reflective of their needs and vision. This process produced clarity and a mission shift to focus not only on addressing a broken system, but on a new way of working that convenes, influences and ultimately improves aid practices. Going forward, NEAR has adopted two organizing principles in working toward the mission: (1) utilizing evidence based research in **influencing** aid policy, while (2) working with members to establish **innovative solutions** to complex structural and programmatic issues.

NEAR's Strategic Goals

With vital and valuable insight of its members, NEAR has developed five strategic goals for 2023, three of which are programmatic goals and two are functional goals.

Our three programmatic goals are:

1



Influence policy

and attitudes to reinvent the aid system as one that is equitable and locally-led;

2



Create an instrument of exchange,

learning, and sharing to enrich Global South approaches toward effective and efficient humanitarian and development practices;

3



Launch new financing mechanisms

that provide more inclusive, efficient and impactful ways of funding humanitarian and development initiatives.

Our two functional goals are:

1



Achieve a **sustainable financial base** for NEAR to support and expand the ambitions of its members;

2



Grow NEAR's membership base for greater reach and coverage.

These strategic goals aim to empower local civil society while shifting power and decision making closer to the communities affected. In different ways, all contribute to transforming the global aid system. The following sections elaborate specific and measurable objectives that will contribute to meeting the goals.

Programmatic Strategic Goals and Objectives

Influencing

Goal 1: Influence policy and attitudes to reinvent the aid system as one that is equitable and locally-led

From its inception, NEAR has worked with its members to discuss and propose policy solutions for complex issues. Initiating its work within the humanitarian sector, it became clear that systematic inefficiencies in supporting affected communities was not an issue unique to the humanitarian sector, but one that existed amongst development and rights-based practitioners as well. To overcome these inefficiencies, NEAR plans to focus its influencing work on redesigning the aid system, both humanitarian and development.

To this end, NEAR will use a variety of advocacy tools – webinars, working groups, speaking engagements, action plans, one-on-ones with international bodies and donor representatives, op-eds, social media, research papers, and NEAR’s very own LPMF – to achieve policy changes that make the aid system more inclusive, efficient, and effective. NEAR members will continue to be involved in and lead many of these initiatives. To shift the positioning of the lead actors of the current aid system, NEAR will produce consistent, evidence-based, clear messaging to deliver results at all levels: local, national and global.

NEAR has identified 3 objectives to achieve its Influencing goals by 2023.

To this end, NEAR will use a variety of advocacy tools – webinars, working groups, speaking engagements, action plans, one-on-ones with international bodies and donor representatives



Objective 1: Increase the formal presence of local and national NGOs amongst regional and global bodies by 2023, such as the Global Cluster Group and the Grand Bargain discussion.

Since its inception NEAR has worked to increase its presence as a collective voice for the Global South in various global and regional bodies. By 2023, NEAR will be a vital voice at the decision-making table.

NEAR members have continued to voice their frustrations with the lack of agency and self-determination in working with their communities to address their collective needs and solutions to humanitarian and development challenges. An integral first step towards such agency is to ensure that local actors (including governments and civil society) are equitable partners to international actors (including bilateral and multilateral agencies, International NGOs, Red Crescent/Red Cross Societies, and others).

While seated amongst various global bodies as an observer, NEAR plans to build on its success in occupying a formal seat at these global gatherings. Currently, NEAR has official and active status within the Grand Bargain (as a signatory and active member of the localization workstream) and the Global Protection Cluster (as a member and advocacy co-lead), both of which are important to system change and are gateways to various other conversations. NEAR plans to expand its presence and engagement amongst both political and operational bodies across the globe, and vertically through the formal aid structure. Examples include but are not limited to IASC, the Global Cluster system, ECOSOC, and others. Finally, NEAR plans to advocate for a second iteration of the Grand Bargain as an important representative body of all actors within the humanitarian aid sector.

As NEAR becomes a vital voice within the international aid system, NEAR will also work to ensure representation at high level fora such as private and public discussions on critical issues in the aid system.



Objective 2: Engage in and support diverse approaches to reinventing aid through NEAR's active participation in local, regional and global fora, convenings and events.

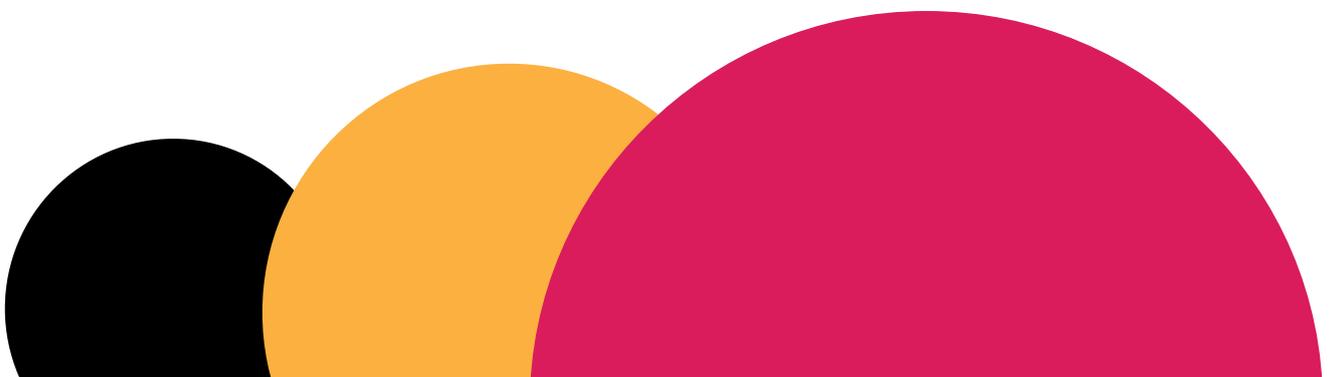
In coordination with an increased formal presence in global bodies and processes, NEAR members have expressed their enthusiasm for NEAR to play an integral role in engaging and supporting diverse approaches in reinventing aid. In 2020, NEAR began to develop relationships with national, regional, and global actors to further develop and disseminate localized approaches to address challenges within the humanitarian and development sectors.

NEAR has found that its membership and other Global South organizations uniquely represent the “Nexus” or the triple bottom line. All NEAR members work in more than one sector. More than two-thirds of members focus on a combination of either humanitarian aid and development, humanitarian aid and peace-building, or development and peace-building. One third of NEAR members work across all three. This information solidified the need for an approach that identifies successes and challenges across all three sectors.

In 2020, in response to COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, the aid sector has seen a need to begin to imagine a better, equitable, localized ecosystem. Leveraging this moment for real change, NEAR has begun to prioritize relationships with both aid influencers and practitioners. An initial step has been NEAR partnership with the Humanitarian Forum to co-host the 2020/2021 World Humanitarian Action Form (WHAF) Summit series: Aid Re-Imagined. The series included an initial forum in November 2020 focusing on the future of humanitarianism, decolonization of aid, and local coordination and representation mechanisms. The deliberations of panel discussions spanning several regional conversations will be incorporated into a policy report to be launched at the 2021 WHAF forum.

As a convener, NEAR will also begin to frequently assemble a group of humanitarian and development academic and operational experts along with members to discuss complex systemic inefficiencies. With such a large network of thought leaders and practitioners, who continue to attempt to solve challenges around financing, coordination, preparedness, and effective response, NEAR plans to capture and disseminate learnings and best practices through guidance notes, reports and ultimately position papers for the wider aid sector.

This and other similar work will become a reference for NEAR as we reimagine aid in ways that benefit our members and the communities they represent.



Objective 3: Influence and recommend updates to standardized approaches and frameworks by advising on improved programming and operational practice.

NEAR has a unique dual mandate to both influence and develop solutions focused on humanitarian and development practice. This begins with NEAR's ability to engage with a majority of actors within the aid ecosystem. As the leading Global South network of local and national organizations, NEAR is frequently approached to assess and develop guidance, standards and frameworks for improved programming and operational practice.

In line with our mission and vision, and as a representative of diverse organizations (in geographical representation, sector and size) it is important to ensure that standards and indices such as Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), Sphere, INFORM and others are taking into account the realities and practices of locally rooted organizations in countries of operation.

With the absence of a formalized framework in moving the localization agenda forward, NEAR developed its Localization Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF) in 2018, with the support of seventy-five stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. The framework focuses on six components of localization: partnerships, funding, capacity, coordination/complementarity, policy/influence/visibility, and participation. The framework will continue to be adopted and contextualized by different actors – from donors to international NGOs to regional networks to local actors – for them to measure their performance on localization. The LPMF will also guide actors on how to develop action plans for improving localization practice.

In 2021, NEAR will continue promoting with use of LPMF and other frameworks to influence the sector while engaging with groups such as ALNAP to produce research for the State of Humanitarian System report. Based on the findings of a global mapping exercise NEAR and its members will also develop a dissemination and monitoring plan for the various uses of the framework. This plan will determine NEARs approach for 2021 and beyond.



Innovative Practice

South-to-South Learning Platform

Goal 2: Create an instrument of exchange, learning, and sharing to enrich Global South approaches toward effective and efficient humanitarian and development practices.

In developing solutions for complex issues within the humanitarian, development and peace building sectors, local actors are faced with insurmountable challenges. Rooted in structural bias, Global South local and national actors are categorized as lacking capacity, risky, and ultimately as non-professionalized subcontractors filling a gap identified by their international partner. Such descriptors have influenced a large investment in capacity building of Global South actors.

Clearly these efforts at “capacity building” have not had meaningful impact. This was mainly because of the way capacity was perceived and the way it was built. COVID-19 has demonstrated that many local actors indeed have the capacity, but often lack the agency and resources. The complexity and volatility of the aid sector dictates a need for all actors to continuously build, learn and adapt. This means there is a continued need for all actors to learn from each other and evolve, placing the focus on “capacity sharing” rather than “capacity building.”

NEAR plans to address some of these challenges by fostering an environment of exchange, learning and sharing among actors of the Global South and making this capacity visible. Through an online learning platform, participants will share institutional best practices and be able to access knowledge in varied modalities.

The platform we envision does not have a precedent, but its criticality and urgency has become clear in the new operating environment created by COVID-19. Once again, we have seen that measures instituted elsewhere in the world are simply not relevant in the communities that our members come from. Although the importance of local solutions has long been recognized, South-to-South learning has been slow to evolve. The voice from the Global South has not always been forceful and coordinated. We are working with state-of-the-art technical teams and world class universities to develop this platform.

NEAR began the design thinking phase of the South to South Platform in December 2020, which will determine the user experience, content curation and final structure of the platform. Upon completion of testing and piloting the platform in 2021, a full knowledge sharing and learning strategy will be developed. The following initial objective has been developed to guide NEAR as a leader in facilitating exchange and learning amongst Global South actors.





Objective 1: NEAR's South-to-South Platform is utilized as an exchange and learning platform by all NEAR members and is open to other Global South local and national organizations.

In partnership with academia, design thinking, and technology institutions, NEAR will establish an online platform designed to share information and learning across members in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East. NEAR intends to launch the platform almost immediately, so that members can capitalize on it as they shape their responses to the COVID-19 and other pressing crisis. In addition, the platform will also provide opportunities for critical exchange through asynchronous learning, discussion communities, and resource sharing. The platform will foster an environment for sharing programmatic and organizational guidance amongst its members.

As a first step in this objective, NEAR will launch the South-to South-Platform as an exchange and learning platform with thirty members by the end of 2021.

Finance Models

Goal 3: Launch new financing mechanisms that provide more inclusive, efficient and impactful ways of funding humanitarian and development initiatives.

The international aid system faces multiple calls for reform and change, from both within and outside the system. Financing is the target of much of the criticism. It is clear that existing humanitarian and development funding and partnership models are not working. Local and national voices are marginalized, organizations are treated unequally, and current approaches do little to invest in the sustainability and resilience of local and national civil society. Although commitments to change have bubbled up to the global policy level, local and national actors themselves are often absent in such discussions. The global 'localization agenda' moves at a snail's pace, with a large majority of international actors delaying changes that would inevitably require them to succeed power, influence, and ultimately financing to the field level.

Since 2018, NEAR has been working with several consultants to develop an array of solutions focused on localized humanitarian and development financing. What was missing was a vision and agenda for change from local and national actors themselves, the confidence and tools to assert themselves, and to demand something different. Financing solutions have been designed to inspire and incentivize change models and alliances, which in turn can be catalytic in changing global financing practices, yet there is a dearth of ideas and proposals for practical alternatives to the current financing model. In this context, NEAR has provided practical, progressive and authentic solutions, driven and designed by local and national actors. NEAR will spend the following three years in working alongside Global South civil society to design, develop and operationalize these solutions.

NEAR has developed two objectives for its work on alternative financing models:

Since 2018, NEAR has been working with several consultants to develop an array of solutions focused on localized humanitarian and development financing.



Objective 1: NEAR will facilitate the development and operationalization of five localized financing mechanisms by 2023.

Building on its past experience and on research and work with local civil society groups in the Global South, NEAR will facilitate, along with local civil society, the design and development of national or community grant-making funds with the goal of capturing both local and international resources. As a first step toward this objective, NEAR will design, develop, and operationalize a Somalia National Fund, and a West Africa Consortia Humanitarian Window by 2021. NEAR will also play an advisory role in the Somalia Fund's governance structure, while supporting its Secretariat in fundraising, design, advocacy and other functional areas. Similarly, NEAR will support existing localized community philanthropy in West Africa to expand their operations to allow for absorption of humanitarian funding, with a heavy focus on impact and learning. Looking forward, NEAR will initiate and cultivate relationships with local, regional and international actors to fund additional localized funding mechanisms.

Objective 2: NEAR will establish a body of localized financing models to influence humanitarian and development aid by 2023.

As a convener of global civil society and an advocate of localized solutions, NEAR believes it is imperative to capture evidence-based research to influence the humanitarian and development financing sector. Learning from its experience, NEAR will design and develop a learning report from our Somalia and West Africa initiatives, along with local civil society and global financing experts such as the Global Fund for Community Foundations. NEAR will incorporate into the report findings from its past research on financing approaches and models, which included learning from activist funds, community philanthropy, faith-based philanthropy, and national Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. During this research process, NEAR realized there was a great deal to learn from each model and approach, and continues to learn from its diverse network of funds. With this rich material as a basis, NEAR will offer an open community of practice on its soon to be developed South-to-South Platform.

The Learning Report will be launched and distributed to the Global South and the international Community and will be actively presented to key donor representatives and multilateral agencies. The process will culminate in NEAR's Innovative Financing Strategy.

In order to achieve the 2023 objective, NEAR will produce and publish a local-led financing learning report to influence humanitarian and development actors by 2021.



Functional Strategic Objectives

Our two functional goals relate to what NEAR needs to do to ensure it has the managerial, technical and financial resources to deliver on our programmatic priorities.

Fundraising

Functional Goal 1: Achieve a sustainable financial base for NEAR to support and expand the ambitions of its members.

In order to achieve its programmatic goals laid out above, NEAR needs a fundraising strategy that will deliver the necessary resources. Accordingly, NEAR has developed a fundraising road map that outlines specific, relevant, and realistic targets in order to ensure a steady growth of funding from 2021 to 2023. The two key growth targets that NEAR believes are crucial to undertaking our Policy and Practice, as well as Membership and Institutional development work are:



Objective 1: To increase our annual budget by US \$250,000 each year over the next three years. (long-term).

Objective 2: To add three new multi-year grant contracts to NEAR's funding portfolio in 2021. (medium-term).

To achieve these targets, the road map that NEAR has laid out as part of this Strategic Plan has several stages:

- First, we will put a dedicated fundraising resource in place: NEAR will actively recruit a qualified Fundraising Lead, who will develop a simple action plan to meet NEAR's fundraising objectives for 2021. In subsequent years, the Fundraising Lead will continue to coordinate with the Leadership Council and Secretariat to develop updated annual plans, as well as a more comprehensive strategy and long-term plan for sustainability, that will take into consideration successes and lessons from preceding years. This position will be indispensable to ensuring we meet our fundraising targets.
- Second, the Fundraising Lead will implement the action plan created, which will have a clear cultivation plan for Foundation and Government donors. NEAR has decided to focus its efforts on Foundations and Government donors as we believe these are the best fits for the type of work we want to do in the coming three years. With respect to government donors, NEAR will specifically focus on the government donors with a proven track record of supportive of localization. Furthermore, NEAR has taken a decision to limit its engagement with bilateral donors, as we do not want to enter contractual arrangements that divert us from this plan or require a heavy amount of servicing at the expense of losing sight of our mission and vision.
- Finally, to enhance our recognition by potential new donors, NEAR will engage in a few high exposure activities to enhance our network and influencing, and also help solidify relationships with NEAR's portfolio of donors. These activities include:
 - Identifying high-potential engagements for NEAR's Executive Director such as participating in conferences, workshops, panels, serving as a keynote speaker. This will be a way for NEAR to generate additional awareness and interest in our work.
 - Continuing to apply for program-based funding opportunities that are in line with our Influencing and Innovative Practice objectives. While this type of funding is more restrictive in that it won't support our operations or overhead, we will engage with these type of strategic programmatic opportunities when they will advance the interests of our members and the localization agenda.
 - Bringing on board Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) staff, with specific responsibility to understand the impact of NEAR's fundraising. The idea is that the MEAL data will serve to feed our fundraising efforts, while also keeping us strategic, focused, and relevant.

Through the aforementioned fundraising efforts, NEAR believes we can successfully leverage the funding we require to meet the objectives and targets of the present Strategic Plan.



Membership

Functional Goal 2: Grow NEAR's membership base for greater reach and coverage.

As NEAR has matured from a movement to a network, we have identified the need to formalize and mobilize our members to help influence and develop innovative solutions to reinvent the aid sector. Since 2019, NEAR's categorization of members has changed from signatories, observers, associates and full members to just associate and full members. This change has been integral in our development and formulation of NEAR's vision, mission and strategic direction. Due to the re-categorization of membership, NEAR has gone from having over 200 members to now rebuilding with nearly ten applications of new full members per month. Our goal in 2021-2023 is to systematically expand our direct members across our four regions, while engaging with already existing local, national and regional civil society networks to expand our influence and coordination. NEAR currently works with more than a dozen local and national networks which represent tens of thousands of community-based organizations, civil society organizations and local NGOs across the Global South.

Continuing from our efforts in 2020, NEAR will expand and engage its membership to amplify the voices of local organizations in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin American and the Caribbean in global, regional, and national deliberations. With access to NEAR's learning and financing tools, this wider base of organizations will utilize these tools to strengthen their own capacity to respond to crises in their own communities.

NEAR's key objective for 2023 is to have 400 full and associate members with representation across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East. It will be achieved through the two following objectives.

Objective 1: NEAR's members are routinely engaged in the work of the network, and their efforts are highlighted and voices amplified through NEAR.

NEAR exists and gets its unique position because of its members. It is essential that members are not only part of the network, but are regularly engaged and visible through the work of NEAR. This will be achieved through:

- Reinforcing internal engagement and communication with both full and associate members, engaging with each type of member in relevant ways
- Ensuring visibility for NEAR members in our external communications
- Supporting our members to be champions and the voice of the Global South
- Ensuring members engagement in the governance of the South-to-South Platform

Objective 2: Growth and retention of members

In order to ensure our member's long-term engagement and continued participation with the network, NEAR will:

- Reinforce our induction process with new members, both full and associate
- Know better our members by having a solid Client Relations Management (CRM) system and regular sessions with members, new and existing, to listen to their needs and concerns
- Support peer to peer collaboration and exchange as well as internal leadership
- Have an active recruitment plan, focusing on our priority countries

By the end of 2021, we plan to have 200 full and associate members.



NEAR's Internal Evolution

NEAR has significantly evolved and matured since its founding in 2016, advancing in a few key ways: NEAR has a Leadership Council (LC) comprised of seven founding members that meet on a quarterly basis and set the direction for NEAR's work. Furthermore, with a greater strategic priority in working from a local to global approach, NEAR's staff has grown with Regional Representatives for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. An immediate outcome of this more structured staffing plan has allowed for NEAR's members – local and national organizations from all over the Global South – to be continuously engaged in a variety of ways: one-on-one, country-based engagement, working groups, webinars, newsletters, social media, surveys, and more. These new structures enable NEAR to function more effectively as a network and to engage more robustly to achieve its mission and vision.

As an organization, NEAR has obligations to its members, to its Leadership Council, and to its supporters. To meet these obligations during the timeframe of this Strategic Plan, NEAR will formalize its Monitoring and Evaluation procedures and ensure that we have adequate professional resources to meet our commitments. We also meet all reporting requirements to governing authorities.

Monitoring and Evaluation —At NEAR, we understand that we occupy a space and a role, but is it making a difference? How and how much? NEAR's Monitoring and Evaluation will be more formalized moving forward. NEAR intends to set up rigorous systems to track our work and what it achieves. We will follow advances in the sector, and we will be accountable as an organization. NEAR will create easy-to-use monitoring tools at the start of the project to track progress against indicators and will look at simple and effective ways to evaluate impact at key junctures and at the project closing.

Staffing —NEAR remains committed to a lean and agile staffing model. Our current staff is made up of 3 Regional Representatives, working across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, with an additional seven technical professionals in the Secretariat. As noted in earlier sections, we plan to hire expertise in innovative financial models, fundraising, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, an additional Regional Representative for the Middle East and an organizer for our engagement in the World Humanitarian Action Forum and other similar events. At the moment, we intend to hire a fundraiser as core staff and the others only if and when we have project funding for their positions.

As an organization, NEAR has obligations to its members, to its Leadership Council, and to its supporters.





In 2018, NEAR developed a three phased approach from exploration to operationalization of a localized/national fund. Upon completion of a theoretical approach, NEAR began its first pilot exercise with several local and national NGOs to gather/explore, design and develop funds in Somalia and Nepal, using localized governance structures and systems focused on responding to real-time community needs before, during and after a disaster. The approach is composed of a participatory design stage, a consultation and roll out phase, followed by implementation.

Governance and the Future

In our effort to shift NEAR from a social movement to a network of collective Global South civil society organizations with a clear vision and mission, development in our governance structures have been a high priority. As a nascent, but quickly growing entity, NEAR currently has a fiscal sponsor which provides historical fiduciary experience. Yet, as NEAR grows in size and purpose, there has been continued discussion amongst the leadership, staff and members on next steps. NEAR believes there is an opportunity to become an independent entity during this strategic plan period and will prioritize an initiation and planning process with the network and its members.

NEAR is currently guided by its Leadership Council (i.e. Board of Directors) that has seven members. Under the LC, there are two committees – one on Governance and one on Membership – that meet on a monthly basis. The Governance Committee, with a mandate to develop NEAR's institutional practices and policies, has set out an action plan and is currently working on drafting NEAR statutes, and preparing for a member meeting in 2021 and its first ever virtual General Assembly to be held in 2022. The Membership Committee, with a mandate to set direction of membership recruitment and retainment, undertook an overhaul of its Membership Policy and Application Process and has been accepting new applications since September 2020. On average, six new local NGOs are inaugurated as NEAR members per month, including in countries and regions where NEAR previously had no members.

As NEAR evolves during these future years, so too will its governance. The legal and governance structure that was appropriate for its launching at the World Humanitarian Summit may not be appropriate for a growing worldwide network. NEAR will be exploring the best structure for impact and together with its members will make necessary and appropriate changes in the next three years.



To contact NEAR's Team,
you can either email us at info@near.ngo
or check our website www.near.ngo