

SWIDN Annual Conference 2025



Thursday 16 October 2025

Our online conference is free to attend and open to all.

10.00 - 10.45

LISTEN 1

Conversations on Development Challenges: Understanding the Issues

Join us for a powerful panel discussion that cuts to the heart of today's development challenges – from structural racism in funding to coloniality in our knowledge systems. Through open and honest conversation, panelists will unpack why these issues persist and share one clear, actionable recommendation for transformative change.

11.00 - 12.00

LISTEN 2

Beyond the Borders of Development: Learning from Other Ways of Working

This panel looks beyond traditional development thinking to explore alternative knowledge, practices, and ideas that challenge colonial frameworks. By drawing on voices and experiences from outside the sector, we'll ask how development can be reimagined in more inclusive, equitable, and transformative ways.

12.30 - 13.30

LEARN 1

Workshop: Decolonising Safeguarding (Who defines safety?)

This interactive workshop on decolonising safeguarding invites participants to examine power dynamics and dominant narratives within development, and explore how safeguarding should be centred within existing community frameworks. Together, we'll identify 3 ways to ensure your approach centres community-based knowledge in nuanced ways that are responsive to the contexts in which you operate.

14.00 - 15.00

CONNECT 1

Learning from the SWIDN Community

This working group showcases lessons from across the sector, drawing on strategies to ensure inclusion, good employment practices, tools to further antiracism, and ethical approaches to storytelling. Together, we'll explore practical ways to embed equity and accountability into everyday work, and learn how these approaches can spark meaningful, lasting change.

15.00 - 15.45

CONNECT 2

Reflecting for Transformative Change

This reflexive session offers space to pause, reflect, and make sense of the conversations so far. Together, we'll consider what we've learned, what it means for our work, and how we can turn reflection into meaningful action, inspired by the practical ideas from today's learning.

15.45 - 16.00

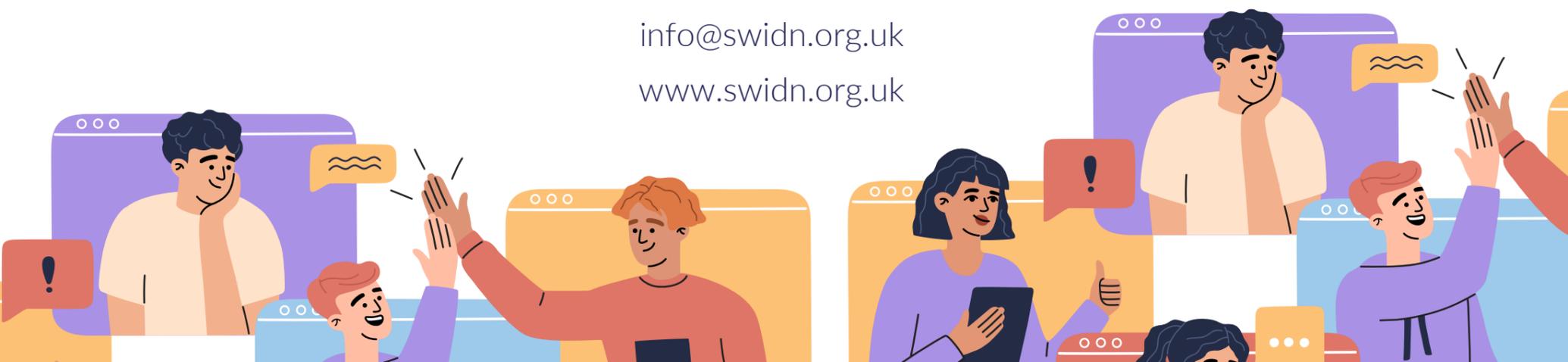
Feedback for SWIDN

[**REGISTER HERE**](#)

Contact the SWIDN Team for more information:

info@swidn.org.uk

www.swidn.org.uk





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1000-1600

10.00 - 10.45

LISTEN 1

[ONLINE HERE](#)

Conversations on Development Challenges: Understanding the Issues

Join us for a powerful panel discussion that cuts to the heart of today's development challenges – from structural racism in funding to coloniality in how we think and what we know. Through open and honest conversation, Eyob, Megha and Janet will unpack why these issues persist and share one clear, actionable recommendation for transformative change to the UK's international development sector.

Remember to join us for our reflection at 3pm when we gather all today's actions to plan next steps together.



Eyob Balcha Gebremariam, University of Bristol

Eyob Balcha Gebremariam is a Research Associate at the Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC), University of Bristol. His areas of interest include decolonial academic knowledge production, African political economy and the politics of development. He is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Humanities in Africa (HUMA), University of Cape Town (UCT), and a Research Fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA). In addition to publishing academic articles and book chapters, Eyob also shares his ideas through Amharic and English blogs and newspaper columns, podcasts and webinar sessions.



[Perivoli Africa Research Centre](#)



[Perivoli Africa Research Centre](#)



[Eyob Balcha Gebremariam](#)



[Eyob Balcha Gebremariam](#)



Megha Kashyap, London South Bank University

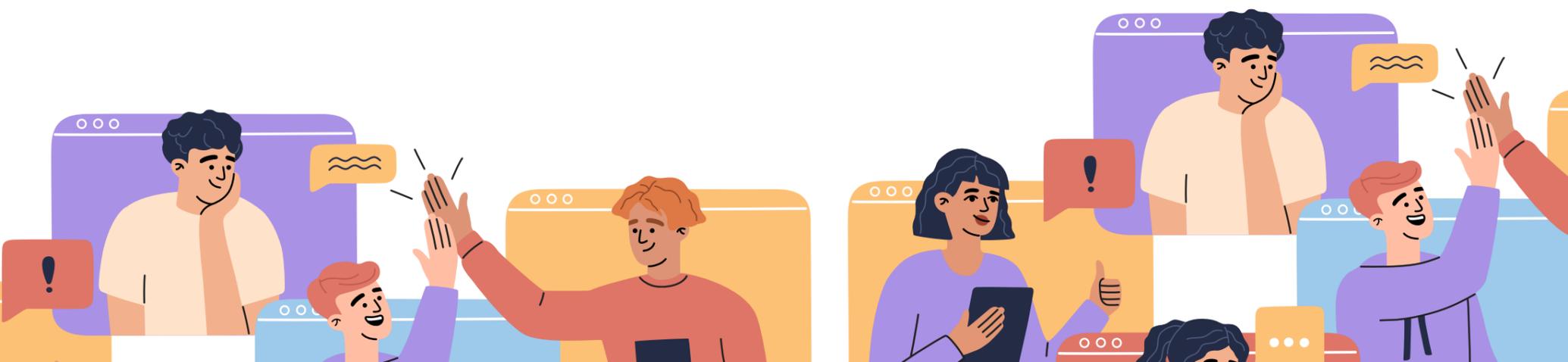
Megha is a feminist academic and activist from South Asia with over a decade of experience working across the development sector and academia in South Asia, parts of Africa, and the UK. She has a PhD in Gender Studies from SOAS, University of London and works as the Decolonising Research Fellow at London South Bank University (LSBU), where she leads the university's institutional commitment to decolonising curriculum, research, and practice.



[Megha Kashyap](#)



[Decolonizing Foreign Funding Policies Project](#)





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Beyond the Borders of Development: Learning from Other Ways of Working

Inspired by the potential to learn from others, this panel looks beyond traditional development thinking to explore alternative knowledge, practices, and values in other social justice sectors. Malaz will speak from her experience documenting humanitarian responses in Sudan, Juliet and Gacheke will share about their work to give informal workers access to savings and credit while addressing their structural exclusion, and Natalie will share her work on feminist leadership practice within the UK's charity sector. By drawing on voices and experiences from outside the sector, we'll ask how development can be reimagined in more inclusive, equitable, and transformative ways.



Malaz Emad, Freelance Investigative Journalist

Malaz Emad is a freelance investigative journalist and podcaster. She has written about her home country of Sudan and the humanitarian response there for the New Humanitarian as well as the Ayin Network. She is a feminist and also serves as an Advisor to The Young Feminist Fund (FRIDA). Malaz is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

 [Malaz Emad](#)

Juliet Wanjira and Gacheke Gachihi, Mathare Social Justice Centre

Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) is an initiative by young members of the community to promote social justice in Mathare, Kenya. For years Mathare has been a place where much violence has been allowed to go on without any redress for its residents, including land grabbing, forced evictions, police abuse and extrajudicial killings. In response, a collective of young community activists in Mathare came together in 2015 to envision a centre that would promote more participatory forms of justice. Juliet Wanjira and Gacheke Gachihi are two members of the secretariat.

 [Mathare Social Justice Centre](#)

Natalie Brook, We Are Feminist Leaders

Natalie Brook is co-founder of We Are Feminist leaders and an independent consultant in the UK gender-based violence field. Through her work with We Are Feminist Leaders she works with individuals and organisations globally to explore what a feminist leadership approach can offer organisations who are looking to create more equitable cultures and transform how power operates in the workplace. Her background is primarily working with community-based services supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

 [We Are Feminist Leaders](#)





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This interactive workshop on decolonising safeguarding invites participants to examine power dynamics and dominant narratives within development, and explore how safeguarding should be centred within existing community frameworks. Together, we'll identify 3 ways to ensure your approach centres community-based knowledge in nuanced ways that are responsive to the contexts in which you operate.



Vicky Ferguson, Director of Safeguarding - Global Fund for Children

Vicky Ferguson is the Director of Safeguarding at a Funding Organisation with a global reach. She focuses on developing internal safeguarding practices and supporting grantees to develop robust and inclusive safeguarding practices, policies and procedures. Before moving 'funder side' Vicky spent 10 years working in small INGOs, predominantly in East Africa. Before moving into 'International Development' Vicky worked with children and young people in the UK in both the Third and Public Sector.

Vicky worked predominantly within Homeless and Substance Misuse Services but has also spent time supporting young people in generic Youth Services. Vicky is passionate about developing Safeguarding Practices, Procedures and Policies that keep everyone safer and are contextually and culturally relevant to those implementing them.

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CONNECT 1

Learning from the SWIDN Community:

This working group event showcases lessons from across the South West and beyond, drawing on strategies to ensure inclusion, tools to improve employment practices, antiracism toolkits, and ethical approaches to storytelling. Together, we'll explore practical ways to embed equity and accountability into everyday work, and learn how these approaches can spark meaningful, lasting change.



Genzenia Charles, West of England Combined Authority

Genzenia is part of the team working on the Good Employment Charter, an initiative from the West of England Combined Authority. Genzenia is an experienced conference producer with a demonstrated history of working in both corporate and recreational industries. She will be sharing about the Charter and how employers in the West of England can access this resource to improve organisational cultures.



[Good Employment Charter](#)



Sara Gwynn, Motivation

Sara is the Head of Policy and Advocacy at Bristol-based inclusion charity Motivation. She has worked in the international development sector for over 20 years, including in research and training. Her work has involved strategy development, capacity development, data collation and analysis, research, monitoring, evaluation and learning, writing and editing.



[Sara Gwynn](#)



[Motivation](#)



Oreoluwa Ojelade, Hub Cymru Africa

Oreoluwa is the Diaspora and Inclusive Officer for Hub Cymru Africa, both a member and sister network of SWIDN. She has a deep passion for advocacy, diaspora engagement, and anti-racism work cultivated during her academic journey at Swansea University. She also has extensive experience in community projects and campaigns that address racism, support diaspora voices, and foster cultural understanding. Oreoluwa works with a commitment to mental health awareness, to recognising the intersectional challenges faced by minority groups, and to the importance of creating safe spaces for open dialogue.



[Oreoluwa Ojelade](#)



[The Anti Racism Charter](#)



Ruby Cardona, Chance for Childhood

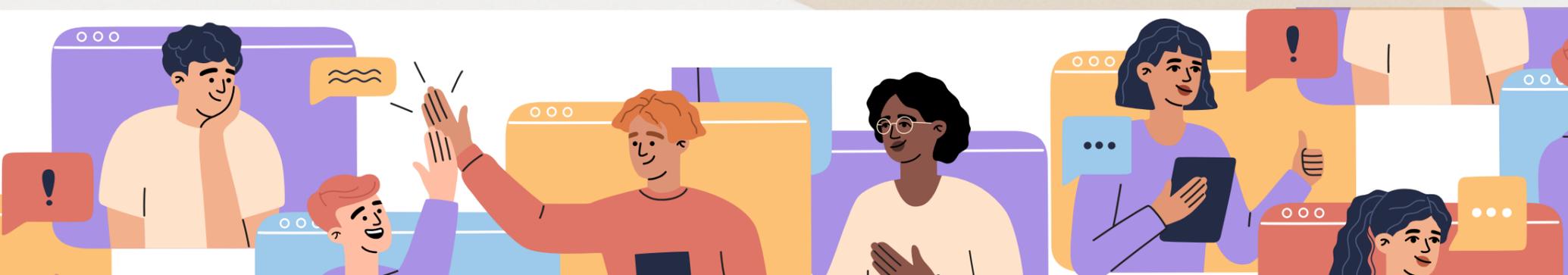
Ruby Cardona is the communications manager at Chance for Childhood. She has been working in international development for six years and is keen to promote ethical, dignified storytelling practices.



[Ruby Cardona](#)



[Chance for Childhood](#)





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CONNECT 2

Reflecting for Transformative Change

One of SWIDN's values is reflexivity, which goes beyond reflection to a place of action that achieves change. We want to finish this year's conference by making space for this to emerge, within ourselves and our community. We'll be using a series of tools in small breakout rooms and a plenary to capture feedback from the days discussions, as well as ideas to build on the actions we've been provided by conference contributors. This session will be facilitated in small breakout rooms by three of the SWIDN Team.



Frances Hill, Co-Chair of SWIDN

Frances has over 35 years' experience in the development and humanitarian sectors, primarily in a fundraising capacity, strategic development and partnerships, and works as a freelance consultant. Frances is based in North Devon and took over as Chair of SWIDN in 2016, moving to Co-Chair in 2022. She holds a Masters in Development Studies, a BA (Hons) in Archaeology and is a Level 2 Accredited Partnership Broker.



Waradas Thiyagaraja, Trustee of SWIDN

Wara (He/Him) is an academic and activist from Sri Lanka with over a decade of multi-level experience in peacebuilding, human rights, gender and sexualities, and development practice. He currently serves as a Lecturer in International Development at the University of Bath, UK. A passionate advocate for sexual and gender justice in Sri Lanka, Waradas has played a pioneering role in decentralizing the country's LGBT rights movement. In 2018, he co-founded Sri Lanka's first LGBT welfare fund, marking a significant milestone in grassroots queer activism. Dr. Waradas joined SWIDN as a Trustee in 2025.



Tom Urry, Trustee of SWIDN

Tom manages the Environment, Water, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction division at Landell Mills and has been working in international development for over 10 years, including previously working at Development Initiatives and Temwa. He has an MSc in International Development and is based in Bristol.

15.45 - 16.00

Feedback for SWIDN

