



CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

A people-centred development institution born out of courage, care, and collective investment.

OUR STORY

How CDSJ was born from loss, responsibility, and a refusal to let communities carry donor withdrawal alone.

A story born from shutdown, care, and responsibility

CDSJ emerged at a moment when donor withdrawal threatened to undo years of community-centred work. What was at risk was not only funding, but also trust, continuity, and the fragile gains that had been built alongside communities through real human relationships. We chose not to read that moment as the end. Instead, we saw it as a call to organise, to protect impact, and to build a new institutional home strong enough to carry justice-centred development work forward.

The founder's call

Adv. Motlatsi J. Mofolo, founder of CDSJ, convened the first circle of committed professionals from the onset of this journey. He brought together people who shared both technical depth and moral conviction, and invited them not merely to witness the crisis, but to invest themselves in building a response. They joined with their labour, relationships, judgement, time, and personal sacrifice, and that early collective commitment became the foundation from which CDSJ was built.

Built first through conviction and contribution, and only later through formal recognition.



1. When the Ground Shifted

When USAID funding was withdrawn, what disappeared was not only money. It was also the structure that had held together trusted relationships, daily community interventions, and the quiet systems of support that people had come to rely on. We watched projects close, organisations weaken, and years of hard work become suddenly fragile. What made the moment so painful was that the loss never stayed abstract, because it reached into villages, care spaces, referral pathways, and community structures where frontline actors had become the real face of continuity. Village health workers, paralegals, community volunteers, and local organisers were not line items in a budget to us, because they were the people helping communities breathe through crisis. That is why the withdrawal stayed with us so deeply, and why we could not treat it as just another shift in the funding landscape.

3. The Founder Who Convened the First Circle

At the centre of that early movement was me, Adv. Motlatsi J. Mofolo, as founder of CDSJ. From the onset, I convened trusted professionals who had carried years of experience in governance, public health, social justice, partnerships, and community programming, because I knew this could not be rebuilt by one person alone. I reached out not merely to assemble names, but to gather people with courage, technical depth, and a willingness to invest in a cause before it had comfort, visibility, or financial certainty. Those who joined did so because they believed, as I did, that the gains communities had made should not be allowed to disappear quietly. They brought their own labour, judgement, relationships, and sacrifice into the vision, and in that way the institution was convened through commitment before it was recognised through paperwork. CDSJ began, therefore, not only as an idea I carried, but as a cause I called others into, and one they chose to build with me from the ground up.

2. Why We Refused to Walk Away

As we sat with that reality, one truth became impossible to ignore. The need had not disappeared simply because the funding had. Communities still needed accompaniment, systems still needed strengthening, and the work of justice, dignity, protection, and inclusive development still mattered. Many of us had worked too closely with communities to pretend that collapse at institutional level would somehow spare the people who had depended on those interventions. What brought us together, therefore, was not only shared professional experience, but also a shared refusal to let that moment become the end of the story. We began asking what it would look like to build something values-driven, African-led, community-rooted, and strong enough to carry forward the spirit of the work we had dedicated our lives to.



What We Built, and What We Carry Forward

4. Building Before Recognition

We did not begin with a polished office, a major donor, or a ready-made institution. In April 2025, CDSJ started informally as a self-funded initiative because waiting for ideal conditions would have meant losing more ground than communities could afford. We used what was already in our hands, which was our experience, our relationships, our skills, our time, and our personal commitment. We invested cash, in-kind contributions, professional labour, and institutional development effort so that community-centred work could continue while a new home was being built. CDSJ was therefore built first through conviction and contribution, and only later through formal recognition.

5. From Informal Initiative to Formal Institution

In April 2026, CDSJ was formally registered as a full organisation, although our story had already begun long before the papers were completed. The real beginning was the choice to stay present when it would have been easier to step away, and the refusal to let communities carry donor withdrawal alone. Registration gave legal form to something already shaped by duty, courage, and collective investment. It marked the transition from urgent response into a durable institutional platform, one capable of growing, partnering, and carrying a longer-term vision. Formal recognition did not create our conviction, but it gave that conviction a stronger home.



6. The Promise That Leads Us Forward

Today, CDSJ stands as more than an organisation. It is the institutional form of a shared promise that justice, dignity, and inclusive development must continue even when surrounding systems are shaken. Our story affirms what African professionals can build together when they refuse collapse as the final word. We built CDSJ to protect impact, honour communities, and create a stronger platform for the future. Out of disruption, something hopeful and durable has emerged, and that is what we now carry forward.



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