

**SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE
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**A Tale of Two Countries:
Exploring the Dynamics of Collaboration**

Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 1:30-3:00 pm

Facilitator:

Ellen Dorsey, Executive Director, Wallace Global Fund

Panelists:

J Briggs Bomba, Director, Campaigns, Africa Action

Cynthia Ryan, Principal, Schooner Foundation

Emira Woods, Co-Director of Foreign Policy In Focus, Institute for Policy Studies



Sponsors:

The Schooner Foundation; Wallace Global Fund

The panel covered the following topics:

- Introduction to funder advocacy collaborations
- How to maximize resources
- How to maximize leverage (look at methods of harnessing different impacts, strategic impact, and greater economies of scale)
- How to achieve transparency, level the playing field, and break power relations between funders and grantees

- Use case studies from Liberia and Zimbabwe as examples of collaborations
- Look at models
- Discuss challenges funders face

Emira Woods described funder collaboratives and discussed “why they are exciting. In order for funders to gain power and achieve their vision of improving the world there needs to be solidarity between advocates and funders. As an example, Zimbabwe Alliance was able to keep growing and impacting the situation on the ground in Zimbabwe because funders began to pool resources to amplify programs. Expanded African Diaspora played a key role in the creation of Zimbabwe Alliance

Other examples are Trust Africa (Africa-based) and Humanity United (US-based). Both have pooled their resources and created an advisory board of individuals from Diaspora, who know what is happening on the ground in Africa.

All of these examples have a common agenda of taking advantage of critical moments in a country’s history to galvanize and build progressive movement (agenda is to expand rights of human rights, media freedom, and women’s rights). A hybrid of funders and advocates are able to influence policies in Africa and the US.

Cynthia Ryan discussed the appeal of participating in donor-collaborative initiatives. The process of developing a collaboration is part of value-added reconnaissance and communication. In addition to co-financing organizations, funders can also be part of a change movement and bring voices into the room that typically do not have access to be heard. Collaboratives empower funders to be better advocates and in turn, empower organizations they are supporting.

J. Briggs Bomba described in more detail how the Zimbabwe Alliance evolved, how it is structured and how they are moving money. Zimbabwe Alliance was formed in solidarity with the people on the front lines of human rights issues on the ground. The 1st conversation on framing Zimbabwe Alliance took place in 2009. There was a historic opportunity in Zimbabwe when the country could move out of crisis and build a new foundation on human rights and socio-economic rights. Zimbabwe was in a catastrophic situation in 2009. There was a collapse in social services and inflation. It was a fragile moment in the country’s history. Therefore, it was critical to provide support to democratic actors on the ground. There needed to be a platform/framework to put various pieces together to leverage and maximize deliverance and impact on the ground. Civil society actors provided information on what was happening. Funders and advocates began to share information and work together to analyze what was happening in Zimbabwe and how to develop a framework that utilized their resources. Funders and advocates discussed how to lift up groups that have been marginalized, and how to strategize the most critical areas to provide funding. There is a false dichotomy of funder and advocates being separate worlds.

Ellen Dorsey discussed how to make decisions on due diligence, which groups should receive money, how to perform due diligence, and how to find new sources of funding.

- List of organization, process of doing due diligence
- Rethink how to look at possible grantees, RFP process, etc., seeking and receiving process as move forward

Becky (Trust Africa, Program Director, Ph.D) pointed out that working in context of Africa where there is a volatile political climate, collaborations are particularly important. There is no 1 institution can manage all the issues on their own. Collaborations enable communities to monitor government at the local level. Funders can build solidarity in different and unique ways and find sources of support for collaborations. Some challenges for foundations are that they cannot have enough skill or information to address the magnitude of the situation they are funding without collaborating with advocates on the ground. Therefore, collaborations expand knowledge base and skill-set.

Audience comments: Collaborations they have been involved in or want to look into:

Diana Samarasan, the Disability Rights Fund is a collaborative between advocates and donors. Another collaborative that is coming up: fund that addresses lack of funding towards disability rights issue.

Valentine Doyle, Lawson Valentine Foundation

Pooled fund example: contributing to New England Grassroots Environment Fund which is small fund and separate organization with its own staff. They were able to sell it to their board because they have a powerful instrument of story-telling (all cultures have story telling ability).

Nikhil Aziz, Grassroots International

With Grassroots, selling to the board was not an issue – board has always felt they are more than a funder, in solidarity with global social movement. 1 of their efforts is US Social Forum (Atlanta 2007) – partners from Global South have been saying no amount of funding can compensate the help they receive in changing US foreign policy. They reached out to US advocacy organizations that they are in alliance with and asked how can they support them, specifically, around US trade, climate, and energy policies. 2007 US Social Forum helped bring people to social forum and organized workshops and panels around this issue which brought together all types of orgs. 3 years of building trust emerged as US Alliance for Food Sovereignty.

Terry Gleenblatt, Urgent Action Fund

Created sister funds in global south (Kenya and Columbia) – each fund is independent and autonomous which is important when talking about collaboration. The funds work with cleaning up mess of conflicts (security and protection of women human rights defenders). They decided to bring together grassroots advocates, community leaders, and politicians to discuss how that could prevent violation (Kenya, Pakistan). They hand-picked 5 women from various countries and surrounded them with politicians, advocates, etc. so that can use their resources and each group launched women's peace initiative. Collective analysis of information is starting point.

Questions and Answers:

Betsy Dietel: Is there discussion, concern, involvement, with individual donors funding projects or board of trustees? How has that played out? Added burden on staff to do collaborative work?

Answers:

Role of trustees for Wallace Global Fund has been good, they see value of putting money in pooled fund, but real concern is how to articulate values brought by this type of collaboration. Sometimes, trustees do not understand that despite economies of scale, collaboration requires a lot more staff time, labor intensive, and is an un-funded mandate for foundation staff.

Therefore, it is important to show them benefits, and clarify what this brings to strengthening a movement, and the work you are doing as comrade funder.

Facilitator: How do you create something that is autonomous and independent yet deals with individual organization's mandates? (Tension that funders must address)

Funders should work within a framework that identifies priority areas and makes secondary the question of supporting advocates organization work. The approach is to do the work in stages:

Cynthia: careful to not put organizations in awkward positions – fill gap and do fundraising for the alliance so they do not have to choose between alliance-building and their organization

Becky: Maintain the identity of the organization

Conclusion

There are opportunities around collaboration, and for funders to pool resources and have a greater strategic impact, richer texture, more comprehensive capacity, and strengthen the legitimacy of the project. Transparency of funding is value system of how we should be operating in philanthropy.