

Telebriefing: Funding in Conflict Areas

November 17, 2010

“Funding in Conflict Areas” is collaborative telebriefing organized by IHRFG, Peace and Security Funders Group, and Grantmakers without Borders

- I. Introduction and facilitation by Azeen Salimi, Program Manager at IHRFG
 - Funding in conflict areas overlaps with many other interest areas, including human rights, peace, security, social justice, and grantmaking.
 - There are three panelists:
 1. Andrew Blum, Program Officer, US Institute of Peace
 2. Reagan Ralph, Fund for Global Human Rights
 3. Zeina Zaatari, Global Fund for Women
 - There will be time for questions at the end.
- II. Andrew Blum, Program Officer, US Institute of Peace
 - Oversees grantmaking in Sudan, and in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

Defining the term “conflict situation”

We are using a spectrum of violence in our definition. An area or region could be violent but also may not necessarily be experiencing active violence. A conflict situation could also represent an area where there is the potential for violence to escalate, and where violence remains a possibility. It is important to talk about regions, and even sub-regions, because an entire country may not necessarily be in a conflict situation.

The challenges of grantmaking in conflict situations: 5 categories

1. **Security:** The physical security of staff, grantees, and partner organizations, and participants in programs is of immediate concern.
2. **Politicized/sensitized environments:** The neutral space to do good starts to shrink in conflict situations. There can be anger because you’re from the US or considered partisan. People also become more inward oriented and start to look out for themselves and their families more.
3. **Logistics:** Operating in conflict situations become more difficult. Challenges include obtaining access to phones, internet, fuel, transportation, food, etc.
4. **International attention:** While the outpour of international support in crises is great, the intensified media attention, political implications, and competition on the ground for best local grantees may create extra challenges.
5. **Highly changeable and evolving situations:** The unpredictable aspect of conflict situations requires additional considerations.

Caveat: These observations are coming from my lived experience, and we are learning as we are going along. This is also contextually based from my work in Sudan and the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

Security:

- There needs to be a match between the levels of risk the organization is willing to take on with the risk the staff is willing to take on. A mismatch can cause serious problems. There must be open conversations about the level of risk involved.

- It is difficult to react to situations, and we need to be more *proactive* in terms of the risk management for our grantees. We have risk management protocols for our own staff, and we should become more proactive in creating resources and security procedures for our grantees as well.
- For staff travel we often have to rely on local organizations. However, local organizations are often more willing to take on risk and it is difficult to say no to our grantees.
- Case: We've been working in Sudan, and giving grants there since 2006. We were asked by a local organization to attend workshop in a high risk area in Sudan that a lot of work had gone into. We had a back-up plan to hold the workshop in a different area with a lower security risk. Having a "Plan B" made it much easier for us to make the decision to avoid the high-risk situation.

Politicized/ sensitized environment:

- There is a shrinking of neutral space in conflict situations.
- Things have become highly politicized in Sudan.
- We engage in a lot of contingency planning, and have to stay flexible as things continuously develop in Sudan.

Logistics:

- All decisions have plus and minuses. We made the decision not to have field offices, and the decision to work with international organizations.
- We chose to work with large international organizations as opposed to solely working with local organizations because of the tendency we found that the local organizations were the elite groups. Does working with only elite groups distort the picture?
- We decided that sometimes it's okay to pay the tax of a large international organization (i.e. Mercy Corps) for logistical reasons. They facilitate processes such as getting resources to local organizations.
- There are often problems with visas and the travel permits needed to travel around Sudan. This puts us and our grantees in difficult situations because we have to rely on permission from the government, who is one of the conflict actors.

International attention topic was skipped.

Highly changeable and evolving situations:

- Recognizing the unpredictable aspect of conflict situations, we still require some kind of evaluation plan from our grantees.
- Case: A grantee's program in Sudan got shut down in the 3rd day of a 13-day program. The discussion of what went wrong opened a positive dialogue with our grantee and partner organizations, and relationships were built in trying to figure out what went wrong.

- In unstable contexts, a lot of things cost more money. For example we have to buy refundable airline tickets, and pay the tax on large international organizations.
- The funders have to acknowledge that working in conflict situations costs more because of the constantly evolving situation as well as the various issues related to operating in a conflict area.

III. Reagan Ralph, Fund for Global Human Rights

- She will talk about her experience funding in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and specifically about her organizations emergency response funding

Case: Nov 4th, 2008, massacre started in DRC:

- The Fund for Global Human Rights received a request from a grantee organization for a grant to get their staff out of that town
- This organization was being targeted by the militia, and they needed to get out immediately
- We sent \$5,000 to Tigali, Rwanda (which was the closest viable neighboring location) via Western Union. A local staff member traveled to get the money, and transported the funds on motorbike to the DRC.
- Because of this crisis, we started working on more specific emergency response

What makes it possible to facilitate grantmaking in crisis situations?

- Flexibility
- Speed
- Having relationships with actors on the ground
- There was lots of donor interest when the crisis hit. That is great, but we need to coordinate efforts so that we are not all bombarding people on the ground with questions at the same time. There are limited cell-phone batteries, etc. that limit the ability of people on the ground to be constantly in contact.

Responses in DRC:

- In DRC we got each donor organization to link up with an organization on the ground, to check in on them once a day, and to have that partnership be their primary relationship.
- We coordinated with OSI South Africa for funding because of our differences in turnaround speeds.
- The Fund for Global Human Rights found this one trusted person (who was a grantee) that was the person who first moved the money on motorbike. He became our point-person to deliver resources to people on ground.
- Thank God for Western Union! We normally don't disburse grants that way, but it proved to be the best way to quickly get funds through in a conflict situation.

To what extent are proactive security measures possible?

- What can us as funders do to prepare our grantees for conflict situations?
- Security assessments are critical.

- People who document human rights abuses are more at risk. The conflict actors see human rights practitioners as political actors.
- From this initial crisis, we created a network for Human Rights Defenders focusing on Central Africa because we saw the need to be more proactive after finding ourselves in a responsive posture.
- The initial leadership for this network came out of those that dealt with the 2008 crisis, and we have become a resource for each other
- One problem was that the same people heading the network were in fact the leadership of the organizations themselves, and became overloaded with work
- A Women's Rights network also formed out of this Human Rights Defenders network to address the specific challenges of women's rights.

IV. Zeina Zaatari Global Fund for Women

- She will be talking mainly about her experience in Gaza.
- There are 3 larger challenges for funding in conflict situations:
 1. Political
 2. Strategic
 3. Logistic

Case: Gaza, Dec 2008- Jan 2009 crisis:

- The war in Gaza made us work through outlining our crisis strategy

Political Challenges:

- Given the current political context in the United States, Israel, and Palestine, which is continuously shifting, the major question is: *will we fund or not?*
- There were ongoing attacks, and Gaza was in a state of imprisonment.
- After the elections, the US placed sanctions on Hamas.
- When Hamas took over, there was a full-blown siege by Egypt and Israel on Gaza.

Questions:

1. Will we fund or not?
 2. What are our responsibilities?
 3. How would we fund and support women's rights within a war?
 4. Do we only fund, or do we engage?
- Through some engagements we were able to gain more donors, but others were lost.
 - There is an even greater need for checks and balances, and due diligence.
 - The Patriot Act and other restrictions from the US created greater challenges.
 - We had to heavily rely on our contacts on the ground to obtain multiple perspectives.
 - Very few of our staff are able to travel given crisis, and therefore we had to rely on our advisors who were on the ground to give us information and on-going assessment.

Strategic Challenges:

- How do we implement our women rights agenda?
- Who do we partner with?

- We had to rely on advisors and grantees inputs.
- There was a constant need for assessment and evaluation in a constantly shifting situation.
- We had to consider donor interest versus local interest in our decisions.
- With tremendous poverty, there is also the pressing need for sustenance and survival.

Logistic Challenges:

- We tried to check in with as many peer funders as possible to remain informed.
- You have to make sure that the staff is competent in the local language and have the capacity to read and gather from all sources of information.
- When crisis hit we worked out a way to establish contact with a group immediately through text messages. Then we made contact by phone and email to establish whether or not all of our grantee partners were secure.
- The next step was to have conversations with our advisors on the ground to ask them: *what are the immediate and possible steps the funders can take?*
- We were told that no money could make it into Gaza during the siege, and the banks were all shut down.
- Because of the intensity of the situation, it wasn't possible to send additional resources.
- Our strategy was to hold off on sending funds and to do an assessment.
- We sent letters to our grantees, offering them symbolic support as well as the option to utilize the funds they were already given for emergency aid and support. We unrestricted the funds that had previously been disbursed.

More on strategy:

- It was important for our grantees to assess the damage to their own organizations and spaces.
- Despite dealing with the immediate crisis, it was crucial to look at it from a long-term perspective.
- We established an emergency fund for longer-term support raised from the burst of international attention during the crisis, which will inevitably decline after attention shifts.
- Within 4 months we did another assessment with our grantee partners to determine what the needs are.
- Within 6 months we were able to give financial support.
- In addition to the work on the ground, it is important to engage within the US in part because of our particular relationship with Israel.
- We worked to provide information in the US and collaborated with sister-organizations.
- In a strategy for crisis, it's crucial to take into account the need to respond in the moment as well as continued support and assessment of needs long-term.

V. Questions:

1. Marcus, IDRC

We have several historic research projects. In conflict situations, how can we have safe storage of research data before, during, and after the project implementation?

Andrew: We have supported the Document Affinity Group. We started with exploring work being done in Cambodia, and supported each other on basic protocol, i.e. how to protect your computer.

Reagan: We think about how we can ensure that our own staffs are not creating security risks.

2. Colleen Dugan, IDRC, Evaluation Unit

Considering the work that USIP has been doing to start tracking unintended outcomes from working in unpredictable situations, how do you actually do about capturing results? What are your methodologies? How do you manage corporate expectations when things don't play out as expected?

Andrew: We don't have a common strategy for evaluation across our grantees. Each grantee gives us a plan for how they will document their activities and outcomes, and every 2 years we have an assessment. We use narrative reports from grantees and through these we try to capture the results. Managing expectations upward, our leadership has been working with funding in conflict situations and understands that things change. What they want is for things to be documented when they fail or change.

Azaina: In most of the cases where we work, we have to rely more on qualitative data, such as interviews. Things don't fit well in a typical evaluation paradigm when working in a field such as women's rights. We take a longitudinal view within a changing context.

3. Urgent Action Fund

In response to the Western Union comment by Reagan, we are facing a great challenge getting funds to central Asia. We used to use Western Union, but they've added security blocks. Is there any other ways to get money into highly repressive regimes?

Reagan: There are very few options, and most involve some risk. One is for a staff member to carry cash on their person. Another possibility is to collaborate with other organizations that may have closer geographic locations to where you need the fund to reach.

Andrew: Have an organization or consultant on the ground that is able to get you hard currency, again, involving risk.

Azaina: You may try to get another organization to receive and transfer the funds. There are also companies other than Western Union that may reach some areas. Another possibility is for a group to travel to a neighboring country and pick up money there. But then they have to carry the cash back or have a bank account in both countries.

4. Coral Weiss

How do you get the permission of the IRS? What about equivalency? Can you speak to the 2924 form and the possibility of other forms? What about IRS regulations?

Azaina: There are different regulations depending on what you're doing and on your organizations form. Except for areas where there are direct sanctions, we can function on a regular basis on an overall permit. We do not require a full equivalency statement. There is the question of which grantees are registered as NGO's with their governments? Being registered can be a major problem in conflict zones, and some groups have to work underground. We don't require our grantees to be registered.

Andrew: We do require a certification of non-profit status. We also have a waiver that describes what kind of work we are allowed to do in Sudan. Even with good lawyers, it's hard to pin down some of that stuff because the rules are opaque. This is a constant struggle.

Lourdes Enga: There are differences between being a public charity or a private foundation, and they have different regulations.

In response to Question 3 (Western Union):

Elaine Nunnaman, Channel Foundation

For getting funds to staff there is the upcoming possibility of mobile banking. This is a potential technological solution in which a mobile phone could be being used for accrediting money.

Andrew: I do think there are some possibilities there. Since we are already talking about the potential of grantees traveling to a neighboring country or capital to obtain funds, it's in those areas where you might see the promise of being able to transfer money through a mobile phone.

Pete Stanga:

There is a spectrum of conflict zones, and they are not just where bullets fly. There are many areas with violent and repressive characteristics which are not in an active conflict. Andrew talked about the costs involved, and for many smaller donors and individual donors, it is hard to estimate the costs. Boards push back to ask: *what are we really using our limited funds for, what are we getting for our money? Should we use it somewhere else?* Money doesn't go as far in conflict areas, and donors need to have conversation about what that entails.

Zeina:

It is important that we talk about conflict with a wider spectrum. There are huge military budgets across the world. It is necessary to have these conversations with donors, and to communicate that immensity of what we are up against. At the end of the day, what we are putting in is a small drop in the bucket compared with the funds going towards arms.