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Let Me In! Grantmaking Strategies to Mainstream the Marginalized

Wednesday July 18, 2012
2:45-5:15pm Closing Session

Session Organizers:

- Catherine Townsend, Program Officer, Wellspring Advisors
- Jesse Wrenn, Senior Program Officer, American Jewish World Service

Panelists:

- Joyce Malombe, Program Officer, International Child Rights, Wellspring Advisors
- Eric Ward, Program Executive, Reconciliation and Human Rights Program, Atlantic Philanthropies

Facilitator:

- Emily Martinez, Director, Rights Initiative Program, Open Society Foundations
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Emily Martinez opened the session by sharing how “mainstreaming” means different things to different people. The session discussed different types of funders and what mainstreaming means to them. Funders deal with many identities and issues. For some funders, mainstreaming can be about how to make their existing portfolios more inclusive. For issue-based funders it can be about whether or not to devote hard-won resources to a particular agenda (ex: women’s rights movement thinks mainstreaming was “death of feminism.” For the disability rights movement it’s the idea of institutionalizing the principle of “nothing about us, without us”) to include people with disabilities in human rights work. Emily introduced both speakers and pointed out that both Joyce and Eric are funding mainstreaming as well as specific issues and identities.

What is mainstreaming at its core?

Joyce Malombe answered this question first by referencing her work in Kenya, where mainstreaming has many meanings. Marginalized people are coming into a space where they were not in before through strategies of inclusion. For example, the women’s rights and disability rights movements in Kenya have worked on creating a space where individuals from these marginalized groups can participate. For a grantmaker, it is a way of addressing marginalization, being sensitive, knowledgeable and finding allies. Some issues are camouflaged and so it is the funder’s responsibility to ask questions and make sure that the groups on the ground are thinking about issues related to inclusion and supporting groups that are invisible to become more visible in their communities.

What does a mainstreaming success story look like?

Eric Ward answered this question by providing an example: The Christian Coalition in the United States was a theocratic, right-wing social movement which was active in 1980s/90s. There were stories in 2000 and 2001 about the Christian Coalition going bankrupt and no longer having the same power it used to have. This raised the question of whether the Christian Coalition was going away because it failed or

because it was successful and was no longer needed as institution. The answer is that it went away because it was no longer needed. They had effectively mainstreamed their issues so that they were indistinguishable from the Republican party leadership.

Another example is from the time of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. The US health system and civil rights organizations were not responding to the epidemic. An organization in NY called ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) started to take action against the AIDS epidemic and caught the imagination of others. This is another example of successful mainstreaming with international implications.

Is mainstreaming success maintaining the strategy for other groups? Or is just about “going out of business” (as in the examples)?

Eric Ward provided that there are 4 core components/sign of successful mainstreaming:

1. An outside institution created for a specific purpose that evaporates eventually (a larger environment or movement takes on the issue)
2. Institutions continue to apply pressure even after you have mainstreamed the issue (example: Funding more grassroots, edgy components of society)
3. Institutions model the idea of continually mainstreaming and give permission for broad ideas (ex: in their due diligence process, they discuss how funding will impact other issues in addition to issue being funded)
4. Issues are reframed at the international and global level. Example: segregation in South in 1960s – this became an issue of how the United States could be a model democracy when they were denying basic rights of certain citizens.

Why does this matter? If you’re a mainstream funder that does not have the capacity to expand or if you are an identity based funder that wants to stay focused, why does this apply?

Joyce pointed out that money is important to social change, but it is also important to look at what we’re advocating as a group, and to think about how strategies will help everyone else, and thinking about who is excluded.

Why can’t we just fund mainstream groups?

Eric answered this question with the reasoning that you need to have representation of individuals who are affected. Funders want investments to have value and this is a critical part of our investment, as is making sure that those impacted have a say. It is also about building a broader frame around issue-based organizing.

Diana Samarasan made the point that it is important to come at this with an understanding that mainstream human rights movements can gain from being inclusionary. There are more innovative strategies on the margins, which mainstream human rights organizations can learn from. Ex: if you’re a mainstream women’s rights funder and not including lesbian women or women with disabilities, you’re missing a huge part of your constituency.

Javid Syed raised the question of whether it is possible for us to keep investing in cutting edge organizations/movements -- what is the impact?

If each panelist could choose just 1 grant around mainstreaming what would it be and what would he/she do?

Eric's example: In the wake of 9/11, national security and the fear of terrorism allowed many things to occur in regards to domestic and foreign policy. It was an environment where you could not convince the majority of Americans that there is something wrong with us. Changing public attitude takes a very long time. Some funders (such as Atlantic, Open Society Foundations, etc.) made an important investment in creating the Security and Rights Collaborative which brought together the Middle Eastern and South Asian community and civil liberties groups. This investment created a mainstreaming coalition at a time when majority of human rights organizations were struggling with discrimination against Muslims and Arabs. This mainstreaming model had a wide affect in the US and globally. When the Peter King briefings were set to demonize Muslims and Arabs in the US and create a context for this to occur outside the US, every major newspaper was condemning the hearings before they even started.

Joyce's example: She would select the main issue she wanted to address, make space for other voices to be heard and create an environment for inclusion and collaboration. When discussing education, you are discussing many things and need to build a coalition.

Is mainstreaming about building partnership or building strengths within institutions to take on these issues?

Eric sees mainstreaming as transformative (not adjustment). If you're a mainstream institution, do you want to be relevant? Most NGOs who want funding need to be relevant in the present as well as the future. Funders need to allow institutions to make mistakes. If you do fund mainstream institutions, make sure that there are other organizations that will keep these organizations fresh and challenged.

Questions and Comments:

- 1) **Brazil Human Rights Fund:** Not everything is always important. You build things based on what is important at that time. Diversity (having a diverse portfolio) is a main component of the human rights movement. At the same time, funders need to stay alert of specific contexts where you cannot mainstream an issue. For example: In 2000 only 2% of Brazilian students with higher education were black. A university started a quota system which was controversial, but it was a moment to build an alliance between human rights organizations. However, this does not happen every day.
- 2) **Emily Martinez** commented that there is a distinction between a diverse portfolio and taking advantage of opportunities to build cross-movement collaboration. The two are not always the same/barely the same.
- 3) **Catherine Townsend:** Wellspring's criteria for mainstream funding are for an organization to have leadership and board buy-in. One staff person is not enough. It helps to ensure that it is not just adding words to a page but that you see it in the organization's mission and strategic commitment.
- 4) **Astraea:** Funders can create moments through long term funding strategies. For example, Astraea wanted to seed and grow organizations of people of color. When they began, they had

to search for queer/people of color groups. Now they have a national coalition of groups that can work together.

Emily Martinez asked the panelists: Is there a danger mainstreaming becomes a codeword for diluting the work. What does it mean to be bold?

Eric answered that it may be co-opted but doesn't mean that the impact is less. Being bold means never giving up the movement building infrastructure. Ex: There is an armed paramilitary, private group called Minute Men, which hunts migrants on the southern border of the United States. Before they began patrolling the border, they asked for federal intervention, which the government "laughed off." This left the federal government in a predicament: should it clamp down or concede to their demand? Minute Men are not big anymore, because the US border control is now patrolling those areas. Just because a policy is co-opted does not mean it will be weaker or lukewarm. This example shows a move from agitation to implementation.

Instead of shying away from tough issues, support NGOs that are pushing further than the mainstream institution as part of the larger strategy. This is capturing people's imagination about what is possible and being bold about how issues should be implemented.

There is a need for building capacity over time -- is this a tactic for groups that want quick results? Is this for donors who want to accomplish something within a year?

Joyce: This is not a quick fix because of everything that needs to happen. It is important to have champions that will continue pushing the issues. Sometimes there is low-hanging fruit, but this is a long-term process. Stick to an issue, be inclusive. If we do not raise these issues then who will raise them? Find allies to build something at ground level.

What is an example of a mainstreaming strategy that failed?

OSF sent out a joint call for proposals for women with disabilities, but did not receive many proposals. When you're looking at marginalized groups, you can't assume that people will submit proposals, so they had to think about how to go deeper and get this community to the table. However, OSF used a more intentional approach in their criminal justice work, where they were funding work in Southern Africa. Grantee partners who work on prisons said that they needed advocacy to build psychiatric institutions because there are people in prison who do not belong there. OSF used this opening to build a program around criminal justice and disability which was a much more organic process. Keep an eye out for openings and also be comfortable with the long-term process.

Wellspring funded an international disability organization for 3 years and much of the support was for this organization to reach out to other movements. The organization built many relationships and networked but did not have much impact. At some point you need a specific plan of action. They were not strategic enough about how they were going to use the partnerships to further their work.

Oak: In their National security funding work, Oak integrated a human rights perspective to national security. They wanted to fund human rights organizations and they had some success to a degree but overall, there was a separation between national security response and human rights response. Other

(more successful) groups used national security actors to talk about human rights. Oak realized that they needed to work through a community.

Atlantic: The immigrants' rights movement in the US framed itself as new civil rights movement. This framing was problematic in a number of ways. The quick response was to bring together African Americans and immigrants into these dialogues. This was a disaster. It set things back because there was no grassroots intention around it. Mainstream institutions and large foundations were top-downing. There was no buy-in or capacity. People did not understand each other's histories. Best way to know each other is to work on a project together. Foundations and groups re-grouped in an organic way which has been successful. How do you get African American community to see immigration as their issue? It was by getting them to take leadership in the immigrants' rights movement. In finding joint issues, some of the outcomes have been significant.

In closing, Emily Martinez pointed out that mainstreaming work cannot be carried out by one group or institution. Until the most marginalized person within a community can exercise their rights, we have not mainstreamed human rights.