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**Funding LGBTQI Rights: Grantmaking Strategies**

July 14, 2014  
1:00 – 2:15 pm

**Facilitator:**

- Javid Syed, Director of Sexual Health and Rights, American Jewish World Service

**Panelists:**

- Mariam Armisen, Found/Program Coordinator, Queer African Youth Network
  - Happy Kinyili, Senior Programme Officer for Body, Mama Cash
  - Anna Kirey, Researcher, LGBT Rights Program, Human Rights Watch
  - Kent Klindera, GMT Initiative Director, amFAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
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Javid Syed, Director of the Sexual Health and Rights Program at American Jewish World Service, introduced the panel. He questioned common assumptions about SOGI issues and LGBTQI organizing, and encouraged the audience to question how, as funders, we can be more thoughtful about both the potential benefits and risks of giving money to movements, and facilitate minimizing harm in our funding. He then asked each panelist a series of questions:

**Which lenses do you use in your approach to LGBTQI funding/organizing?**

Anna Kirey, Researcher, LGBT Rights Program at Human Rights Watch (HRW) explained that her lens as a researcher is to document human rights violations against LGBTQ people in the region. As a result, she knows where the groups are working and the issues they are facing. Happy Kinyili, Senior Programme Officer for Body at Mama Cash explained that in both her roles at UHA and Mama Cash she used a feminist lens. Kent Klindera, GMT Initiative Director at amFAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research, said that even though amFAR has historically focused on MSM/gay and trans\* people, the organization is using a human rights lens to address international funding and advocacy for AIDS/HIV prevention. Mariam Armisen, the Founder/Program Coordinator of Queer African Youth Network, which uses queer, youth and feminist perspectives.

**In the organizational development phase, money can be used in harmful ways. Where do you see money being useful or harmful in the LGBTQI movements in your regions? And what models of grantmaking would be most useful?**

Mariam highlighted that, whereas MSM groups have been organizing for a long time in Africa around HIV prevention, other groups have not been able to, due to funding restrictions. HIV

funding was restricted mainly to MSM groups and so it made a lot of people invisible within the movement. Additionally HIV funding divided the movements into service provision work and human rights work, weakening the movement. Language is also a barrier to receiving money in Africa—there are 16 countries in West Africa with three main languages. How groups related to English speaking funders versus French speaking funders can have a huge impact on funding flows. Because the LGBTQI is a new movement in West Africa, it's important to move away from project driven funding to general support in order to allow groups to focus on organizational capacity building and movement building. Nascent groups cannot sustain themselves on project funding. It's important to consider funding staff salaries and office expenses.

Anna specified that in Eastern Europe the groups are incredibly nascent and that is little to no funding for them. For these groups, it's a matter of survival and adaptability—they are building small networks, exchanging information online about medical issues, especially around trans\* and intersex issues. These groups are providing the necessary inter-community support but they are not able to challenge the system right now. In Ukraine there are 42 major LGBT organizations but most of the funding comes from the Global Fund for health and HIV prevention. As a result, trans\* people and lesbians are often left out. All groups have had to stop activities in Russia due to an increasingly unsafe environment. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which are both dictatorships, groups are working under much duress. Anna highlighted how few funding coalitions there were. It is important to fund a process to convene people around a common goal. It's extremely important to fund trans- and intersex groups because they have no funding and the wider movement is ignoring them. Lastly, very few people are fluent in English so translation of proposals into Russian is key if funders want to build partnerships in hard-to-reach places.

**As LGBTQI and HIV funders, how do you see your work as contributing to addressing some of the critiques Miriam and Anna have identified?**

Happy emphasized that “the person who wears the shoe knows the fit.” It is important to support nascent groups even if their ability to receive large sums of money is precarious. Happy underlined that the “doing” of the grant—that is receiving the money and implementing programs—is how they learn the skills for handling money and planning activities. It is true that we have to think of risk and accountability as funders; and sometimes the risk-averse will place restrictions on the grant, which prevents group from being able to use money in ways they see fit. Taking time and risk to analyze the context and listen to the groups will lead to responsible grantmaking.

Kent described his program as a peer-led process with grantees who are very diverse and nascent. He agreed that funding grassroots organizations is about taking risks. In fact, his grantees are called “awardees,” so groups do not owe anything to the funder in terms of reports, nor does Kent have to go to his board for approval. Kent urged funders in HIV and human rights movements to collaborate more. The push for sexual health and condom use has deflected attention from other important issues and we should encourage work around health outcomes as opposed to service provision.

**Regarding Uganda, Nigeria and Russia: What happened? What are your insights to what could have been done differently as grantmakers?**

Anna brought attention to how Russia is trying to be a leader of traditional values in the region, and assert its control over the former soviet countries. Unfortunately, Russia is gaining allies at the UN amongst other like-minded countries, so it is important to follow what Russia is doing, but also follow trends of where Russia is engaging in the region and help other countries counter similar laws. It's not just about anti-homosexuality. It is about increasing limitations on civil society. Russia is mobilizing moral panic based on the overall anti-Western sentiment. Russia is scapegoating LGBTQI people to sustain its anti-Western legitimacy.

Mariam underscored that coalition building is important in West Africa. The movement in Nigeria and West Africa is not politicized enough and was not able to tackle the backlash because there was not enough restricted/non-HIV funding. QAYN did a baseline study and found that groups who had already received MSM/HIV funding were willing to look at other issues.

**As funders, what have you found effective or challenging in supporting movements, building coalitions and politicizing issues?**

Kent sees success happening when personal relationships have developed between the leading activists and politicians. Funders should look at how to they can ensure activists can remain and live as activists so that they can take the time to build important relationships, like funding their salaries.

Happy spoke about how Mama Cash brings divergent groups to a table to discuss issues, (such as financial management training or some other skills building,) and groups build relationships in those settings. In Africa, the main challenge is patriarchy. All of these anti-homosexuality laws and anti-pornography bills are the government's response to attacks on patriarchy. We need to trust groups to make their own decisions. Funding must be flexible.

**Question & Answer**

**Are queer people increasingly being used as scapegoats? Is this part of a larger issue?**

Anna highlighted that migrants and Ukrainians are also demonized in Russia, just like queer people. When anti-LGBTQI legislation passed in Russia, there was a lot of solidarity in civil society because everyone has been a target by the government at some point.

Mariam said that even if countries haven't been in the news for anti-LGBTQI legislation, things are happening and it's important for funders to go to countries that are not necessarily in the news.

**What are the barriers to core/general support funding? What does the data say? How much money has gone to core funding or are we all already doing core funding? Are we preaching to the choir?**

Christen Dobson from IHRFG underscored that a lot of organizations have said they want to do core funding but when then they are faced with the challenge of raising money each year. These organizations cannot always know if they will be in the position to provide core support.

**Other comments:**

Lessons learned from ten years of funding by Atlantic Philanthropies: allow for peer-to-peer exchanges; help grantees become recognized experts to policy makers; Help grantees build relationships. Fund general support and also fund multi-year grants to ensure security of income. How can they act strategically when they don't know what's going to happen five years down the line? Empowering advocates to think strategically will fundamentally change the game. Funders are nervous. They want to control the outcomes, but they need to be flexible with how they enable organizations to change their outcomes and respond to changes strategically.

Fund communications and help advocates develop their messaging. Much of the communication against the anti-LGBTQI laws in Nigeria and Uganda was too Western and perpetuated the narrative that homosexuality is a Western construct. Communication needs to be used as an advocacy tool and partners need to be able to frame it and brand it in their own way.