
Enabling Environment for Philanthropy and Civil Society
WINGSForum workshop, February 21st, 2017, Mexico City

Synthesis

Background

Philanthropy support organizations play an important role in improving the environment for philanthropy. As a global association of organizations supporting philanthropy, WINGS is committed to contributing to the creation of a more enabling environment for philanthropy and civil society globally. In fact, *Infrastructure in Focus: A New Global Picture of Organizations Serving Philanthropy* Report found out that 35% of WINGS members are extremely engaged in advocacy and 32% are moderately engaged.

WINGS organized an International Meeting on the Enabling Environment for Philanthropy, held on March 10–11, 2016, in Lisbon, which gathered 35 representatives of philanthropy infrastructure organizations and key partners from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America that resulted in a document that presents a picture of the global scenario for philanthropy, highlights regional perspectives, showcases examples of global cooperation in place, defines possible responses for the current problems and looks into the future by presenting a ‘road map’ for the global philanthropy community.

Building on the Lisbon Meeting and aiming to identify concrete actions and collaboration, and develop synergies among actors addressing enabling environment issues, WINGS gathered on February 21st, 2017, in Mexico City, about 50 representatives from organizations supporting philanthropy, foundations, international organizations and other institutions working to create a more enabling environment for civil society and philanthropy.

The meeting was introduced with short presentations from WINGS partners engaged in enabling environment issues. Iva Dobichna from the Open Society Foundations talked about current global trends, Douglas Rutzen from International Center for Not-for-Profit Law shared his vision of priorities for a more enabling environment and Amy Taylor from CIVICUS presented the support the network provides to its members and identified potential collaboration avenues with other networks.

This introduction was followed by the presentation of the Lisbon meeting outcomes and results from a survey sent to the meeting participants prior to the meeting. Its aim was to better understand the scenario and challenges related to a more enabling environment so participants

could define key parameters affecting a discreet area and propose actionable steps for the short and medium term.

The survey sent to participants in anticipation of the meeting shows that restrictions on the receipt of foreign funds was the strongest regulatory challenge reported by respondents to the work of their organizations, followed by reporting requirements and restrictions on the distribution of funds internationally, while restrictions for incorporating and restrictions on the distribution of funds domestically was said not to be a challenge or to be less of a challenge by more than half of respondents. On the responses to the problem side, the most frequent activity for addressing closing space issues is knowledge production and dissemination. Interesting is that most of them are not working alone to address closing space issues, either collaborating with peers from other regions and/or collaborating with other sectors.

Participants were then organized in table discussions to address the following topics: Using evidence/ data for knowledge and information building; Strengthening philanthropy infrastructure organizations; Advocacy and campaigns; Coping strategies (under duress); Confronting false narratives; and Building on positive experience.

Synthesis

A shared concern for the ability of civil society and philanthropy organizations to operate Civil society and philanthropy support organizations who participated in the workshop (and signatories of the annexed Declaration) share the vision that philanthropic freedom and civic space more broadly are under attack and must be defended and promoted.

Worldwide, civil society and philanthropy are facing a concerning trend towards heightened control and excessive, unwarranted restrictions on funding, both locally and internationally. Although these trends are not new in many regions of the world, the fact that it is now reaching the global north is making it a shared global concern.

In the domestic arena, barriers on the ability of civil society organizations to incorporate, operate and receive funding are pervasive in far too many locations. With respect to the international context, over the past several years, dozens of countries have adopted new laws and regulations that hinder cross-border funding, often under the guise of protecting security or preserving sovereignty. In many countries, a negative narrative is developing around civil society as corrupt, unpatriotic and bad for business.

Between 2012 and 2015 restrictions worldwide have doubled each year according to ICNL. Although we now observe a tendency toward a certain decrease, this has become a major global concern, and the current political agenda in the US and many other countries are more than ever alarming global civil society actors.

These challenges are not transactional (pushing back against one law) but transformational (ICNL).

This shared concern goes beyond the civic space issue and embraces more broadly the current threats on democracy and the rise of populism and nationalism as expressed in the [Mexico City Declaration](#) that was shared later at WINGSForum.

Organizations whose role it is to support private resources and collective civic action are decided to oppose these negative trends and to develop a culture of giving and solidarity globally.

The urgent need to develop domestic resources and philanthropy infrastructure to sustain local civil societies

One of the arguments used by governments to restrict civic space is the foreign origin of funds and the supposed unpatriotic dimension of civil society work, in particular around sensitive issues such as human rights. Although this argument must be countered in itself, it also highlights the urgent need to develop more local private resources for common good.

Of course, philanthropic freedom and cross-border giving must be defended and it is important not to systematically oppose foreign and local funding. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge the necessity to grow local/national philanthropy for several reasons.

First of all because it is the best way to counter negative narratives based on the denunciation of foreign funding of civil society and its supposed alignment with non-domestic priorities and interests.

Secondly, because the development of a sound local philanthropic ecosystem - or in other words of a strong civil society local resourcing - can concretely allow to cope with restrictions on cross-border giving and ability to receive funds from abroad. If local private resources are available to address the needs of the societies, including on the edgy issues of social justice and human rights, restrictions on foreign funding's negative impact can be mitigated.

Last but not least, developing strong and well-organized local private funding is a gage of sustainable resourcing for civil societies. While international funders may come in and out, domestic funders have a natural ability to offer long-term perspectives to support a cause in a specific place. It also conveys other potential benefits such as proximity and potentially improved synergies on the ground with the domestic socioeconomic tissue.

This echoes most civil society actors' call to funders to look at longer perspectives.

Some funders working internationally are starting to consider support to local philanthropy development as part of their sustainability and/or exit strategies, and also as part of their core social mission.

Philanthropy infrastructure is a crucial element to achieve this evolution as it can build capacities (skills, impact), capability (ability to act, available volumes of funding), credibility (legitimacy through transparency and advocacy for the field) and connections (synergies, constituencies with other actors). It should be considered as a strategic ally in developing domestic funding for civil societies.

The potential role for WINGS and other heads of networks

As described in the next point, a variety of actors are engaging in addressing enabling environment issues: NGOs, researchers, activists, foundations, diverse networks and platforms. Global heads of networks such as WINGS (philanthropy), CIVICUS (civil society organizations) and IFP (NGOs), have a specific role to play as focal resources and connection hubs. Through extended global membership, they have the potential and legitimacy to support, strengthen, coordinate, and accelerate the work that is handled in different parts of the world and at different levels.

Most of the work around enabling environment issues happens at local and national levels as it is where most regulations and other key factors are decided. Action is sometimes relevant at regional levels too (for instance at EU level) but more rarely at a global level (FATF discussions and some global discussions and negotiations, for instance UN related processes). Therefore why are global networks of networks particularly important in this issue and where does their potential lie?

- ✓ **Allow economies of scale:** develop or disseminate standards and tools for the sector, develop synergies within their networks.
- ✓ **Accelerate learning and scale-up:** disseminate best practices, lessons learnt from successes and failures; facilitate local-global connection: disseminate researches, campaigns, quick international response to local situations, campaigns and awareness raising.
- ✓ **Provide thought leadership and counter narratives at global level:** by aggregating qualitative and quantitative data from their networks, they are in a position to develop or help develop counter narratives about philanthropy and civil society globally. They can make the case for philanthropic freedom and diversity.

Through knowledge, tools development and efforts to creating culture of data-sharing they build transparency that enhance trust and credibility of their field.

As thought leaders, they can encourage their members to start or further engage on enabling environment issues and to anticipate some of the evolutions that were seen in other contexts.

- ✓ **Bring support to members and reinforce capacities:** through their own expertise and/or the one that lies within their network, they can reinforce the capacity of their members and provide technical assistance e.g.: data collection, sharing and harmonization; compliance with requirements and audits; coping strategies; etc.

They can be effective in deploying rapid support mechanisms to members under direct threat and provide specific support.

They can play a useful mediation role between funders and actors who are on the front line. As “Fundermediaries” they can host pool funds to redistribute in the network with a flexible and bottom-up approach: this allows funders to mitigate risks, and to include a form of articulation.

- ✓ **Connect and inter-connect:** they can ensure convergence and connections within their networks and articulation with the other parts of civil society and key sectors.

Behind the different activities mentioned above, WINGS and other heads of networks mobilize their constituents through a variety of collective processes, including meetings and affinity groups which create linkages and space to initiate new collaborations. Different solidarity mechanisms can be activated between members, for instance mentoring network of successful advocates.

As exchanging about enabling environment issues can be risky, they can also provide safe in-person exchange spaces when open sharing of information is not possible.

As their strengths lies in their members, subsidiarity prevails and models where some organizations take the lead on behalf of the network are relevant, for instance EFC representing WINGS/the philanthropic sector at the NPO group of FATF.

Heads of network also have the potential to articulate dialogue and collaboration between different parts of civil society: development NGOs, civil society organizations, philanthropy actors of different natures. These cross-sectoral connections cannot only happen at the global and headquarters’ level but should also happen at members’ level. Networks can facilitate connections among their respective networks at the country or regional level.

A strong global mobilization

While philanthropy actors are increasingly mobilized: funders are getting involved, new initiatives and organizations are emerging, civil society platforms are launching new projects around the issue, and infrastructure organizations are mobilized, the representatives of global networks (representing the spectrum of civil society actors: civil society networks and organizations, national NGOs, and philanthropy support) have decided to join forces in order to articulate their actions further, and build on the outcomes of the Mexico meeting. Their commitments are outlined in the annexed [Declaration](#), signed jointly by WINGS, CIVICUS and its Affinity Group of National Associations and International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP), and the attached [cases](#) is the first element of their articulation.

Organizations and initiatives that were present or mentioned during the workshop include:

Adam Pickering	Charities Aid Foundation
Amy Taylor	CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Ana Toni	Institute for Climate and Society - iCS
Anke Paetsch	Association of German Foundations
Ansis Berzins	Community Foundation Movement in Latvia
Armando Casis	Asociacion Unacen
Atallah Kuttab	SAANED
Barbara Ibrahim	American University in Cairo
Bhekinkosi Moyo	Southern Africa Trust
	Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace
Chandrika Sahai	Open Society Foundations
Cristina Parnetti	
Cristina Ruiz	Cemefi
David Carrey	CECP
David Lindberg	Council of Michigan Foundations
Deborah Doane	Global Dialogue
Dominique Lamaistre	FONDATION DE FRANCE
Douglas Rutzen	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
Esther Hughes	Global Dialogue
Federico Bellone	Porticus Latin America
Gail Campbell	ZENEX Foundation (representing IPASA)
Hope Lyons	Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Ian Bird	Community Foundations of Canada
	Ashoka University Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy
Ingrid Srinath	Open Society Foundations
Iva Dobichna	
James Magowan	DAFNE
Janet Mawiyoo	Kenya Community Development Foundation
Jason Franklin	Johnson Center for Philanthropy
Jenna Capeci	International Human Rights Funders Group
Jenny Hodgson	Global Fund for Community Foundations
	Workshop on the Enabling Environment
Joanne Harding	Reichstein Foundation
John Spierings	
Jorge Villalobos	Cemefi
Laurel Carleton	Community Foundations Canada
Lauren Bradford	Foundation Center
Lourdes Sanz	Cemefi
Lucille DiDomenico	Philanthropy Southwest
Maggi Alexander	The Philanthropic Initiative
Maree Sidey	Australian Communities Foundation

Maria Chertok	CAF Russia
Martin Garber-Conrad	Community Foundations of Canada
Maurice Makoloo	Ford Foundation
Michael Mapstone	CAF
Mizmun Kusairi	Guidestar
Naila Farouky	Arab Foundations Forum
Natalie Ross	Council on Foundations
Nick Deychakiwsky	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Nolitha Tiba	African Philanthropy Network
Paula Jancso Fabiani	IDIS
Richard Marker	Wise Philanthropy Institute
Rosa Gallego García	Spanish Association of Foundations
Sarah Afraz	Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy
Sarah Tansey	International Human Rights Funders Group
Shaun Samuels	SGS consulting
Susan Njambi Odongo (Kaniu)	Kenya Community Development Foundation - KCDF
Suzanne E. Siskel	The Asia Foundation
Tevfik Başak Ersen	Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV)
Thomas Hilbink	Open Society Foundations
Timotheus Lesmana	
Wanadjaja	Indonesia Philanthropy Associations
Tina Thiant	HGG NPO Sustainability Solutions
Vikki Spruill	Council on Foundations