

2009 SESSION REPORT

20th Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference | 14 – 16 May 2009
Rome Cavalieri | Rome, Italy

tel.: +32.2.512.8938 | fax: +32.2.512.3265 | e-mail: aga@efc.be | web: www.efc.be



Addressing poverty through empowering women: a rights-based approach

Moderator: Christopher Harris, Ford Foundation

Speakers: Filiz Bikmen, Sabanci Foundation; Nicola McIntyre, Mama Cash Foundation

Session proposed by: Sabanci Foundation and Mama Cash Foundation

This session, conceived as a ‘facilitated conversation’, critically assessed the added-value for foundations to use a rights-based framework to break the cycle that perpetuates the impoverishment and marginalisation of one of the most disempowered groups in society – women. It also provided concrete and meaningful examples of what to do and what not to do when designing and implementing grantmaking programmes to empower women and address the multiple forms of discrimination that they face. In addition, the session provided an opportunity for participants to link strategies to collectively create opportunities to end the injustice of poverty.

Asked by the moderator **Christopher Harris**, from the Ford Foundation, **Nicola McIntyre**, from Mama Cash Foundation, defined the rights-based approach as a conceptual framework for the process of human development, based on the principle that all human beings have certain rights to which they are entitled and that there are minimum standards for living with dignity that have to be respected. According to Ms. McIntyre, this approach seeks to analyse inequalities and redress discriminatory practices that hinder development, and its final aim is that of achieving social justice and peace.

Applied to foundations’ grantmaking, a rights-based approach means that foundations must be willing to focus on the realisation of the rights of the excluded and marginalised, giving preference to strategies for empowerment – understood as the process by which the capabilities of people to demand and use their rights are strengthened- over mere service delivery oriented responses and keeping a holistic view that takes into consideration family, community, the authorities, the accountability of the state, etc. and funding groups where there is a high degree of participation in designing programmes and leadership in implementing them from the people intended to be the beneficiaries of the change.

Filiz Bikmen, from Sabanci Foundation, explained that applied to women’s empowerment, a rights-based approach looks at the complex underlying challenges facing women in society with regards to poverty, it tackles the root causes of women and girl’s disadvantage in society - their unequal position in society, their disempowerment and exclusion-, and therefore aims at achieving a sustainable solution.

Given the limited funds for rights-based approach initiatives, foundations can play a great role in lifting women out of poverty, even through innovative actions not directly addressed to women but nonetheless having an impact on them. Ms. Bikmen and Ms. McIntyre gave some examples of this by briefly presenting some of the projects funded by Sabanci Foundation –their Joint Programme with UN Agencies in Turkey selected as one of the best six human rights case study projects globally- and by Mama Cash Foundation – Women’s Rights Action group in Tanzania raising awareness of women as land owners through theatre and radio, The Anti-Trafficking Centre in Serbia, and a Mexican Centre that monitors public expense and its impact on women.

Their recommendations for designing and implementing rights-based programmes included, among others:

- Having a multidimensional approach in terms of activities and a multi-stakeholder approach in terms of the actors involved and supported;

- Looking at different ways to cross-fertilise initiatives, introducing a gender dimension, the gender impact in projects addressed to other sectors;
- Creating effective communication mechanisms from the early stages of project designing, as it is essential that grantees are aware of foundations' initiatives and policies and vice versa, and that all that is visible to society in general;
- Bringing women and women's NGOs together with local authorities to develop strategic action plans at local level with the aim of adding a gender lens to the policies and practices of local governments;
- Training educators, as multiplier agents, on gender equality;
- Designing long-term grantmaking to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability;
- Being clear about our own theories of change;
- Pay especial attention to identifying women's groups that have a clear analysis and strategy; being able to fund groups working at the intersections;
- Being flexible, providing core support and convening grantees; and
- Taking into account the context and the underlying and linked institutions of power.

The role of the various funders groups –like EFC, GPF, Davos, etc.- as spaces to build stronger collaborative networks for a rights-based approach to funding was also underlined.

Some participants kindly shared with the audience their own rights-based approach initiatives, like the **African Women Development Fund**, which seeks to create more spaces for women's participation in the political arena; **Women Win**, which focuses on women's empowerment through sports; **the Delhi Foundation**, where a \$90 fellowship granted to a young girl resulted in a 3000 strong women's group willing to break the silence around violence and run talk groups on their experiences and show the effectiveness of social power multiplication; **the Central America Women's Fund**, which funded poetry workshops for women that ended in women's rights raising awareness groups; and the case of two grants by the **Global Fund for Women and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust**, that allowed the creation and the campaigning of a women's political party that represented women in the "Good Friday Agreements" negotiation process.