

**REMARKS BY KATHLEEN CRAVERO (PRESIDENT, OAK FOUNDATION)  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

My first reaction to the invitation to speak at the closing session of this conference was: “Why me?” There are many in this room with more knowledge and experience of philanthropy - in Europe and elsewhere. Careful reading of the remarks made by colleagues in previous years - including Barry Gaberman, Rien van Gendt and Francis Charhon, among others - confirmed this view. So it is not surprising that I decided to speak to an issue that I do know something about and which seems (fortunately for me) to be a matter of priority concern for many members of the EFC: relationships between foundations and multilateral institutions. Another term for this is “public private partnerships”, but these usually include NGOs, private sector corporations, bilateral aid agencies and governments. In these remarks I will focus on relationships with multilateral organizations such as United Nations agencies, the World Bank and the European Commission. I will refer to these groups collectively as multilaterals, to distinguish them from corporations, NGOs and governments.

Before joining Oak Foundation as its President in 2009, I spent 25 years in the United Nations - serving five different agencies in several different countries. During that time I had numerous encounters with foundations - both European and American - and it has been interesting to reflect on that experience, from the foundation point of view.

In these remarks I will address three questions:

- (1) What are some key differences in perspective and context between foundations and multilateral organisations?

- (2) Given these differences, why would foundations and multilaterals be drawn to each other?
- (3) What are some ideas for moving forward?

## II. KEY DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE AND CONTEXT

### Donor vs. Partner

When I was serving as a country representative of a United Nations agency, I readily agreed to meet foundation representatives. To me (and to most of my colleagues), foundations were potential donors - in other words, we smelled money. On most occasions, however, funding did not materialize. Foundations were not interested in being donors to the United Nations; they wanted to be “partners”. They wanted to become part of a common mission, deliver services more effectively or achieve greater scale. While I saw all this as potentially useful, it often seemed that one-sided partnerships were being proposed. The UN should provide information, contacts, introduction to government and sometimes even logistics; the foundations would then (after careful due diligence) fund the civil society organizations of their choice. I later learned that many of the foundation representatives felt uncomfortable at my expectation of cash. From their perspective, I wanted money with minimal involvement and no creative sharing of ideas. They were confident that they had much more to offer. I was left wondering: “Like what?”

### Long-term, big picture vs. small, specific and “impactful”

As a UN representative, my principal job was to support the governments with which I worked to plan and implement nationwide programmes. My perspective was necessarily fixed at “30,000 feet” and I thought in terms of 5, 10 and 20 year periods. While some foundation partners were focused on long-term social change, many had more immediate, closer-to-the-ground concerns. They were

interested in piloting new approaches in particular areas, with pre-selected NGOs, for much shorter periods of time. I was concentrating on getting the best existing practices implemented; they wanted to discover new, more effective approaches altogether. Neither of us was good at seeing how those perspectives might work to our mutual advantage.

### Government as client vs. Government as adversary

Both multilaterals and foundations work in countries at the pleasure of government. If governments are unhappy, they can either forbid our presence or make operations intolerable through taxes, visas and other regulations. While we both want to help governments improve, our relationships to them are usually quite different. Multilaterals work through government, acting as funders, advisors and advocates. Thus, multilaterals often appear weak, compromising and hopelessly bureaucratic.

Foundations on the other hand, can work around governments or pressure them in one direction or another, whether it be to fund services provided by civil society groups or to change a set of laws. Private foundations have greater latitude and room to manoeuvre. In most cases, however, the changes we seek are closely aligned. It is a classic “working from the inside vs. working from the outside” dilemma - and too often we waste time criticizing our different approaches rather than coordinating our efforts.

### **III. REASONS TO COLLABORATE – DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES**

After many years of missed opportunities, I began to understand the value of collaborating with foundations - even if they were not prepared to write me a check. These past two years as a foundation President have crystallized these views. Foundations have precious, strategic advantages over multilaterals which,

used wisely, are worth much more than money. In fact, they represent skills and contributions that money cannot buy.

For example:

- *Appetite for risk* - Foundations take calculated risks on a regular basis while multilaterals must be cautious, spending months (and sometimes years) getting governments “on board” before anything can be changed.
- *Commitment to innovate* - The history of development is full of examples in which foundations dared to dream and persisted for as long as it took to make those dreams come true. These include the Green Revolution, the development and roll-out of vaccines and improved approaches to issues ranging from universal basic education, to domestic violence, to child protection.
- *Speed and flexibility* - Even the best multilaterals are relatively slow moving; recruitment of experts and procurement of supplies must follow set, competitive procedures that can drag on for months. Foundations and their civil society partners manage to be just as thorough in a fraction of the time. A UN colleague once remarked that a foundation grant of \$100,000, provided tomorrow, is worth more than \$1 million dollars from another multilateral that take two years to arrive.
- *Strategic clustering of grants* - Multilaterals are often linked to particular ministries and have a hard time shifting as opportunities and leadership emerge elsewhere. Foundations can zero in on a goal by funding whoever and whatever can move it forward, forming new partnerships - and even creating new organizations - when necessary.

- *Lower political profile* - When Governments are incapable or unwilling to do the right thing, UN agencies must cajole, convince and compromise. As long as foundations stay within the framework of the law, they have much wider latitude to fund alternative – and sometimes even opposition – groups.
- *Champion research and evaluation* - Convincing governments to engage in research and evaluation is not always easy. First, action and services provide greater political gain; and second, it is not always in the official interest to find out what is or isn't working. Foundations can fund research as a complement to the implementation or service delivery that receives public funds.
- *Strengthen civil society* - This is an obvious one, given the long standing commitment of foundations to the non-governmental sector. But whereas foundations often fund individual NGOs, there is much less funding of the sector as a whole - the networks, "anchor" organizations and other types of infrastructure that make civil society strong and enduring. Multilaterals can (and do) advocate for this strengthening but are often constrained from funding it directly.

**If foundations offer all this, what do multilaterals offer in return?**

There are at least three key advantages that multilaterals bring to these partnerships.

- *Size and scale* - Without connections to larger organizations with long-standing presence and relationships in countries, foundations risk creating "islands of excellence" that fail to have lasting or measureable impact. Smart foundations can use these partnerships to achieve change way beyond their individual (and even collective) reach.

- *Access and influence* - While acknowledging that access and influence are not the same thing and that one is often mistaken for the other, the fact remains that multilaterals can use their privileged position vis-a-vis governments to reinforce broad-scale system and policy change. They can get advocates “through the door” at key points in time - including them in the discussions and debates on the basis of which national decisions are made. Multilaterals can also help governments to create environments more conducive to private funders, an issue of direct concern to the Global Philanthropy Leadership Initiative (GPLI).
- *Replication* - Multilaterals can use their global reach to apply innovations and lesson learned across countries. This provides foundations with the leverage that we so often talk about - a leverage of funds, policy influence and operational strength.

#### IV. THE WAY FORWARD

These reflections lead me to four overall conclusions regarding partnerships between foundations and multilaterals.

- (1) ***Comparative advantages are only valuable if they are recognized and used.*** My experience has been that the obvious complementarities between foundations and multilaterals are either ignored or under-valued. The flexibility of foundations must be combined strategically with the scale and influence of multilateral agencies. This requires a clear agreement on roles, responsibilities and outcomes and a “partnership design” that is suited both to the funders and their common goals. Imagine the impact if we put on collective strengths to work to address the gaps in funding and action for women and girls that is outlined in the report entitled Untapped Potential, presented here earlier this week – and imagine the missed opportunity if we don’t

(2) ***Lack of understanding limits collaboration.*** I wish I had reflected more thoughtfully on the potential for foundation partnerships when I was a UN representative. If I had spent as much energy understanding the strengths of private funders as I did trying to get them to change, we could have - together - moved the needle on a number of important issues. Both multilaterals and foundations need staff with the time and skills necessary to make partnerships work and should reward collaborative efforts when they occur.

(3) ***Connections must be made between innovation and scaling up.*** I firmly believe, that the innovative “pilot” projects of foundations can and should form the basis of improved nationwide efforts. We need to work together to link progress at community level with national decision making; we should join hands to strengthen civil society in ways that guarantee continued improvements after we both are long gone.

(4) ***Success should be celebrated and lessons should be shared.*** There are many examples of successful collaboration between multilaterals and foundations. We need to look at those experiences more carefully and disseminate the results. Communication is key and should be focused on the achievements of the partnership rather than the contributions of individual partners.

In The Art of War, a well-known collection of advice from one of the greatest strategists of his time, Sun Tzu writes:

“If you do not seek out allies and helpers, then you will be weak and isolated”

And he went on to delineate three key steps to establishing strategic alliances:

- (1) Determine what it is that you need but don't have;
- (2) Determine who has what you need; and
- (3) Ask them for it, being sure to offer something in return.

That about sums it up – advice as relevant now as it was so many years ago.

Thank you.