



The Power of Giving for Systems Change

Thursday, 14th September 2023

Virtual Session – Outcome Report

Event Brief

Philanthropic capital, when deployed in a strategic manner, has the potential to create transformational social change. Non-profits typically address issues of a highly complex nature that cannot be reduced to a simple chain of cause and effect. Identifying and tackling the root cause of these issues is at the heart of systems change – a deep dive into dismantling the systems that enable issues to continue to exist and grow as opposed to the band-aid approach, which results in temporary solutions.

This session, facilitated by **Dina Sherif, Executive Director at the Legatum Centre for Development and Entrepreneurship at MIT** explored how strategic philanthropic investments can catalyse positive, impactful change, tackle complex social issues, and fund sustainable solutions that address root causes to enable systems change in action.

Dina was joined by expert panellists **Caitlin Baron, CEO of The Luminos Fund; Ellen Agler, CEO of The End Fund;** and **Nick Grono, CEO of The Freedom Fund**, who unpacked how each of their organisations takes a systems-level approach towards achieving their distinct missions by leveraging philanthropic resources to address root causes, challenge existing paradigms, and foster long-term solutions. Speakers also shared insights and examples from their respective fields of work into how giving can be a powerful force for shaping equitable and resilient systems across various sectors, as well as the important role of scalability and collaboration in creating meaningful and lasting impact in society.

Key Takeaways:

- **Complex Problems Require Nuanced Approaches:** Traditional philanthropic approaches of scaling one successful organisation may not work for complex and overwhelming problems like education, endemic diseases, and human trafficking. Attempt to think outside the box for nuanced approaches and solutions.
- **Avoid Admin Costs and Dysfunction:** Sudden scaling of a single organisation can lead to increased administrative costs and operational dysfunction when dealing with multifaceted challenges. In order to maintain a cohesive approach, ensure you are collaborating where you can and stagger the scaling to allow you to keep focus of the main objective in the operations.
- **Holistic Problem Solving:** Effective systems change philanthropy involves looking at problems as a whole, considering factors like vulnerability, criminal perpetrators, poverty, discrimination, and more. When looking at your philanthropic focus, consider what other factors might be playing a role in perpetuating the issue.
- **Value-Add Lens:** Philanthropic organisations should identify where they can best add value within the broader problem and collaborate with others to drive change. Operating in silo can only get you so far and no complex global issue can be solved alone.
- **Global and Local Engagement:** Solutions should engage both global and local levels, recognising the universal nature of challenges like education while addressing local nuances. Ensure you are also engaging communities in closest proximity to the issue area, as they understand it best.
- **Deep Listening and Stakeholder Mapping:** Deep listening to all stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, researchers, and affected communities, is essential for understanding the complexity of a problem. As a donor, we must not assume that we ourselves have a full understanding of the problem and the solution.



- **Shift Perspectives and Establish Common Goals:** Encourage stakeholders to also shift their perspectives, assume a learning mindset, and work collaboratively to establish a common goal and framework. Establishing clear common goals through inclusive, participatory processes is crucial for alignment and coordination among multiple stakeholders. It's essential to invest time and effort in aligning stakeholders' perspectives and building a sense of community before jumping into action.
- **Data and Evidence-Based Alignment:** Data and evidence-based processes can lead to increased alignment and collaboration, especially in areas where differing perspectives exist, such as estimating the prevalence of issues such as human trafficking.