

Exploring Series Part 2

The Art of Advocacy and Storytelling in Philanthropy

Wednesday, 20th September 2023

Featuring guest speakers

Cristi Hegranes, CEO & Publisher, Global Press and Muna AbuSulayman, Partner, Transform VC

Facilitated by Andine Sutarjadi, Director, 21/64

Summary:

This interactive, closed-group, virtual session was the second of a two-part Exploring Series for Circle members where different facets of strategic giving are explored from various perspectives featuring global and regional keynote speakers, and with expert facilitation from [21/64](#).

The second part of the Exploring Series was on *'The Art of Advocacy and Storytelling in Philanthropy'* and featured guest speakers **Cristi Hegranes**, *CEO & Publisher at Global Press*, and Circle network member **Muna AbuSulayman**, *Partner at Transform VC*, who explored the power of local and global advocacy and storytelling in elevating awareness around a social issue. Speakers shared insights about the power of empowering local journalists and communities to cover issues that authentically represent community experiences. The conversation also covered how funders can consider advocacy and storytelling to evoke empathy, inspire action, and effect meaningful change for the issues they support and communities they champion.

Key takeaways:

- Utilising local talent in storytelling, journalism, and media can be very impactful and transformative and is key to achieving development goals. It is the local people who have the historical, social, and linguistic context to tell their stories authentically. By 'passing the pen,' we can honour the right of local communities to recognise themselves in their stories.
- Amongst the plethora of stories that do exist, bringing to light the right ones requires persistence and an awareness of the behavioural trends of a certain society – what resonates the most. This is important in order to ensure the right problems are addressed.
- There is an evidence-based understanding of the direct correlation between the people that sit in a newsroom and the people who are featured in news, which is why local representation is imperative. Local voices can bring to light real issues that people are facing on the ground in a sensitive manner, hold those in power accountable, and garner the trust of local communities in a way that foreign correspondents cannot.

- Investing in advocacy and storytelling of issues: for funders, independent journalism should be second on your list after investing in actual solutions to the issues. Independent journalism can be well-balanced and highlight multiple perspectives instead of a one-sided rhetoric. Oftentimes it is not that people do not care about certain social issues, it is that the way they are written about or portrayed does not resonate with audiences.
- Philanthropy has the power to invest in authentic, local, journalists and storytellers. Investing in independent journalism as a primary strategy can amplify a funder's mission and subject areas by resulting in better informed stakeholders. It can also be beneficial to establish relationships with the correct value-aligned media representatives from where your audience is based, to bring messages to light. The first step is to start by being better news consumers and media literate about what is authentic.

Individual donors, who are a part of the Circle network, joined the session with 21/64, as well as first time attendees to Circle convenings. Attendees were engaged throughout the session and especially during the Q&A segment. Having two guest speakers who each respectively brought a global and regional perspective to the topic of advocacy and storytelling in philanthropy proved to be highly beneficial for the regional donors in attendance. Participants were able to see each side of a different journalistic culture and resonated with both the global and regional perspectives.

The Circle network is a closed community of individual and institutional philanthropic donors. If you are interested in learning more, please visit circlemena.org. To express interest to join the network, kindly email Amreen Vadsaria, Programme Associate on the Governance in Philanthropy Programme directly on avadsaria@pearlinitiative.org.