

Samagam 2022

Session 2: Why are donors seeking to co-fund? Experiences and challenges

“Collaboratives is not a bed of roses, but a thorny path for a better future” – Shashank Rastogi

Moderators & Panellists

- Moderated by Mr. Shashank Rastogi, Principal, India Rural Prosperity Lead, Bridgespan Group India
- Mr. Kashyap Shah, Principal, Bridgespan Group India
- Dr. Saurabh Garg, IAS, CEO, UIDAI
- Ms. Priya Naik, Founder and CEO, Samhita Social Ventures
- Ms. Yasmin Madan, Director, Programs at Co-Impact
- Mr. Arnav Kapur, Lead – Philanthropic Partnerships, India & South Asia, BMGF

The session was moderated by Mr. Shashank Rastogi, Principal, India Rural Prosperity Lead, Bridgespan Group India, with the focus specifically on funders as collaborators. Shashank shared that Bridgespan believes in collaborations as an effective medium to create large scale social impact. He invited Kashyap to share insights gained from their research on various collaborations in India and set the context of managing and running such collaboratives.

Kashyap shared findings of a study, and key learnings from collaboration experiences in terms of why philanthropic collaborations are required, key challenges of collaboratives and the recent emerging trends, post pandemic. Collaborative model holds promise. Multi-stakeholder (especially in case of India) and multidimensional collaboratives bring in diverse skillsets, but that needs more robust alignments and course corrections. Kashyap shared three key things on why people usually collaborate to address large, complex problems

- a. 80% organisations collaborate to leverage diverse skills
- b. 77% collaborations happen to expand the circle of influence and impact, and
- c. 60% to mitigate risk.

The research revealed that collaborations primarily have three goals: scaling solutions; help build a field; build a case for promising innovations.

On the other hand, it's found that a range of key roles are played by collaboratives to achieve impact like finance mobilisation or on-ground implementation.

While talking about the learnings from philanthropic collaborations, Kashyap pointed out that challenges vary according to life-stages of collaboratives that can be categorised:

- a. Coming together – zero to two years.
- b. Working together – executing the shared goal – two to ten years or slightly beyond.
- c. Reinventing and or exiting.

Challenges come up at each of the respective stages of collaborations. Trust deficit is certainly a challenge. Problems of long-term funding and association and achieving scale are also prevalent. Problems of siloed approach by partners in terms of prioritising can plague collaborations. Demonstrating and quantifying impact is also a factor that complicates collaborations. But, benefits of collaborations outweigh the challenges. In fact, post pandemic there has been an enormous increase in number of collaborations over the past two years. Funding has also scaled up.

Commitment (on behalf of all partners), Clarity of roles between partners, and ability to do Course-correction from time to time are key elements to run an effective collaboration.

The discussion was taken forward by the panellists where they shared several exciting aspects of forming collaborations and also respective challenges and how they overcame them. Arnav mentioned collaboration, especially multidimensional, means 1+1=11 in terms of scale and impact but remains bound by limits of clarity, time and alignment.

Priya Naik pointed out that trust among unlike-minded partners got visibly built during pandemic. No logos or egos were involved for the first time and there was a sense of urgency especially during the pandemic time. But there were limited resources, complexities of multiple collaborations and risk of duplication. However, because of the individual efforts on behalf of collaborators and the prevalent sense of urgency, rapid course-corrections were made possible.

Yasmin mentioned that major focus of the Co-Impact initiative (launched in 2017) is on gender-equality. There is appetite among funders to bring large scale impact – US\$500 million already mobilised with 45 philanthropists and funders coming together across 16 countries. She shared that her programme partners are in the driver's seat and not seen as beneficiaries. Gender fund has been initiated to bring women's leadership at the forefront. But it's a journey of significant learning opportunities. The goals are aligned but ways of achieving them are different.

Dr. Saurabh Garg acknowledged the fact that seeing multi-partner collaborations creating impact gives a certain high. Whereas 95% of total funding comes from the Govt., the rest of the 5% coming from philanthropies and CSOs in terms of knowledge and gap/bridge funding to catalyse the 95% and make it much more effective. Working with number of partners also makes for good optics.

Addressing the question of what could be models for collaborations to succeed and potential risk elements while working together leading to suboptimal outcomes, Priya mentioned that the secret to successful collaboration is 'customisation' as per participants' changing needs and multiple priorities of the funders to make the most out of whatever limited resources one has. Co-creation is second most important and mutual trust keeps the participants together even as needs evolve.

Yasmin highlighted that the 'ingredients' of success in collaboration revolve around understanding participants' needs and one of the key ingredients being discussed here is 'winning coalitions' to go past windows of opportunity and move towards steadfast investment that is needed. The next ingredient needed is 'constituency feedback'. As much as the government systems can become more responsive to the people, we have our role too. So, we set up monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that data reflects impact and provides constituency feedback, rather than having us – 'funders' – showing our own impact or prove that the outcomes were achieved. System's level outcome – bringing changes in system in an enduring way is important. Funders tend to pull organisations in different directions and they lack strategic coherence. Flexible funding is important. CSOs know what has to be done – that is an important ingredient rather having only an outcome/output-oriented mindset.

Arnav stressed on spending time upfront to understand long-term vision, strategy, values of collaborators for trust building. E.g. BMGF's tribal health collaborative with several ministries, NITI Aayog and the Piramal Foundation which took two years to be conceptualised but was extremely crucial. Co-creating strategy and results framework is the second important aspect in such collaborations. Setting up a strong governance model is another key ingredient for ensuring scale and course correction.

Responding to what can help collaborations with government to work, Dr. Garg mentioned it's crucial to have clarity of value that each partner is bringing to the table. The government brings in scale, but *samaj* has the community connect essential for development. Similarly, donors have the knowledge which is necessary for such a work. Government therefore needs to realise the gaps, and skills that the partners bring in to make it a win-win for everyone concerned. Secondly, whatever is decided it is important to see that it meets the needs of individual partners, keeping the process in focus. Third, the programme objectives remain the same, irrespective of course-correction.

How can collaboration leverage technology? Dr. Garg mentioned that digital identity infrastructure for 1.39 billion people has showed how it can be used by different stakeholders for the benefit of the nation. The use of the UIDAI by different partners is an enabler. GIS based technology can be leveraged for implementation of different programmes, available for everyone to use at more or less no-cost basis. We also see how to use technology for monitoring, audit and performance for the *Samaj* – CSOs i.e. how a smartphone can be made useful for this and become a means of empowerment for the whole country.

Responding to what kind of trade-offs have to be made or buy-ins are necessary among internal stakeholders when it comes to successful collaborations, Arnav mentioned looking at alignment of stakeholders where the (BMG) Foundation can add value keeping priorities of partners in mind is crucial. Impacting SDGs broadly should always be the concern, building consensus among all the stakeholders is necessary, because the probability of having the desired impact without a successful collaborative would be much lower.

Yasmin commented that alignment around goals matters, but revisiting the problem analysis and agreeing on what is being solved, mapping system actors and thinking slightly beyond the collaboratives as well, towards the evolving role of the collaborative is also very important. But trade-offs for funders is the ability to design or request for the outcomes that are aligned with them. If the focus is shifted to how we fund from what and why, then trade-offs appear to be less. Trusting on what the partners know and letting go what the funders know is crucial. Secondly, one has to acknowledge the power dynamics. Power is with the cheque-holder but that does not mean that knowledge of the problems and the possible solutions also rest with them. Looking at the value add of the philanthropic funding is another major aspect. But commitment of funders towards partnerships should remain high.

Priya mentioned that the magic of a collaborative is who are we doing this for and who are we doing this with? The people who are we doing this with, needs to be clear about who are we doing this for. If one invests in monitoring, evaluation and learning right from the beginning of the process then the voice of the person whom the collaboration is intended for becomes central to the entire process. This ensures not just efficacy but also responsiveness. Blending of interests of funding partners often change the trajectory of the processes involved and with technology, now playing a larger role than ever before, all of that is a great possibility today. And over the pandemic period these collaboratives could really benefit and people got benefitted because of various technology advances that India had achieved before and during the pandemic.

Shashank asked about the future of these collaboratives post-pandemic once the urgency situation is over. Priya responded expressing her optimism that the transition from responding to crises to collaboration during work as usual has already happened. Collaborations across stakeholder groups have been a success which has built confidence. Insight experiences and relations have to be reflected upon during this period of 'relative calm' before another emergency rocks the world. And

all of it can be achieved in a collaborative manner, without having to be competitive, building on each other's strengths.

Shashank asked how would government look at similar collaborations once the pandemic is over and what was communities' reactions to such collaborations? Dr. Garg mentioned that relevance of collaborations is beyond question but the nature/purpose of collaboration is needed can be figured out – e.g. for implementation strategy, community connect, market linkages, MEL, communication and so on.