

Two Days to a Better Future

On a holiday weekend in April 2011, with football crowds audible from a nearby stadium and helicopters hovering incessantly overhead, a dozen activists from six continents gathered in a conference room at the offices of the Brazilian civil society organization Vitae Civilis in São Paulo.

They talked about how to use small grants to promote change and sustainability by empowering local communities. They drew up lists of all the great things about small grants, discussing how they are innovative and flexible; how they reach otherwise geographically and socially isolated groups; how they promote diversity and can offer quick responses to emergencies. They drew maps and ran through other interactive exercises commonly associated with such gatherings.

But mostly they exchanged information about how to best develop and run small grant programs. And, judging by the comments afterwards, they learned quite a bit from each other. “I prefer this kind of process to a course in the university,” said Jorge Mora Portuguese, secretary of the Freshwater Action Network Central America (FANCA) in Costa Rica. “I wondered if it was really worth it to come all the way over here for two days, but it was,” said Benilda Camba, task force enterprise development coordinator for the Non Timber Forest Products – Exchange Program (NTFP-EP) in the Philippines. Camba also summed up the sentiments of most participants when she added that, “I just wish there was more time” – stressing, however, that she “expects more emails” to continue the exchange in the future.



The idea for the gathering came from the Amsterdam-based group Both ENDS, and it was hosted by the São Paulo-based Center for Socio-Environmental Support (CASA). All of the invitees have been working on small grants with Both ENDS for quite a while now.

The following essays offer short introductions to the participating organizations, with an emphasis on their experiences with small grants. The texts are based primarily on interviews that we squeezed in over the two days - during lunch breaks, before dinner, or even over a beer. They are not meant to be comprehensive, nor technical, but rather to serve as trailers, much as those for movies, to provide a glimpse into the work of these groups and the role of small grants in the larger scheme of social and political change.

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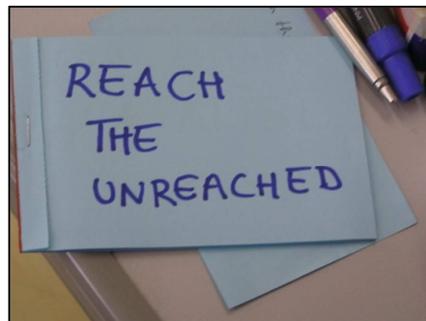
To Boldly Go Where No Fund Has Gone Before

The Center for Socio-Environmental Support might just be the Thomas Pynchon of the foundation world. Innovative, politically-committed and successful, CASA (its acronym in Portuguese) has also mimicked the best-selling king of modern experimental literature by keeping a public profile so low that only true insiders actually know whether it really exists. The difference might be in CASA's precociousness. Pynchon built his career over the years, but in less than a decade CASA launched a groundbreaking Brazilian fund in a country with no tradition of such endeavors - and quickly expanded that initiative to neighboring countries. Now, with recent shifts in the Brazilian and global economies, CASA aspires to help spawn a culture of homegrown philanthropy in Brazil, something also lacking in South America's largest nation.

With such pioneering accomplishments to its credit, why have you never heard of CASA? "CASA isn't supposed to be out in the limelight, taking political stances. It helps worthy groups do their own work," said Maria Amalia Souza, co-founder and executive director, explaining the publicity-shy stance. "Our only audiences have been the donor community abroad and our grantees."

CASA emerged from the experience of Souza and fellow Brazilian civil society organization (CSO) leaders with the small grants managed by the US-based Global Greengrants Fund (GGF). They perceived the need for micro-grants to communities and small organizations as a compliment to their own work in disparate parts of continent-sized Brazil. The idea was to bring in foreign cash and use local knowledge to funnel it to places where it would help strengthen groups working with social and environmental issues. "We try to go where others don't go," noted Souza. "We are able to do this well because we are part of this complex system that is promoting democracy, environmental protection, and cultural diversity. We are able to read things in ways that don't always translate abroad."

The first grants were made in 2005, with money from GGF and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Quickly the budget grew to about US\$1 million, enough for an average of 80-100 grants a year. As the budget grew, the success stories piled up. They ranged from pin-point practical interventions to help for groups and networks aiming to change public policy at the national level:



- Communities of indigenous people, descendents of escaped slaves and other locals in what's left of the Atlantic Rainforest, nudged between urban centers Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, received money to buy freezers and processing machines to improve and expand their ability to make products from the berries of palm heart trees. Instead of cutting the endangered plants, often selling them on the black market, they now harvest the berries to make juice, a value-added product that brings greater revenues. They have also begun planting trees, reversing an earlier trend that was leading to extinction.
- As part of a reforestation program to support landowners in the Amazon who are resisting onslaught of soybean cultivation, the Kisêdjê indigenous community began to grow and sell saplings. In addition to generating much needed cash from the sales, the project has expanded into cultural preservation.
- Support for a group called Xingu Vivo para Sempre (Xingu Alive for Ever) allowed indigenous groups to take their place with other interested parties in the debate over the controversial Belo Monte dam project in the Amazon.

CASA has also been instrumental in the formation, survival and success of sundry networks of small CSOs that have sprung up around issues or in regions, including the Pantanal Network, the Environmental Education Network of Bahia, and the Brazilian Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations and Social Movements. And because it works with the concept of eco-systems rather than national borders, it has expanded to include initiatives in neighboring countries, such as Bolivia in efforts to protect the Pantanal wetlands that fail to respect political borders.

Since most foundation and public cash is limited to project support, specifically excluding assistance for basic operations, CASA's help in the back office quickly generates a multiplier effect for many groups that are struggling for their very survival. "They have been able to immediately access other funds, and to put up matching funds where necessary," said Souza.



Speaking of funding, CASA is about to embark on an effort to overhaul the way it generates its own revenues. The endowments of many US and European foundations took a big hit with the 2008 financial crash, engendering cuts in outlays. At the same time, the Brazilian economic boom has convinced many of these same foundations that the country is too rich to be a donor priority. "Now the foundations think that Brazil has enough money and that they should help people in other places," Souza noted. "But the money is being brought in by the big guys, and they are doing more things than ever that threaten the environment."

Tapping into money at home is easier said than done. For starters, the organization wants to maintain its "no-compete" policy in relationship to the CSOs whose leaders count among CASA's founders, including some who still sit on its board. What's more, as Souza explained, "There is no philanthropic culture in Brazil. Companies that make social investments run their own projects instead of giving money to local initiatives."

Jump starting a philanthropic movement in Latin America's largest nation might seem daunting. But considering CASA's illustrious track record over its brief history, the smart money would have to be betting on success.

Acupuncture for Development and the Environment

How can a thousand dollars for a small water management project in El Sur, Costa Rica really make much of a difference? So these people got a grant to plant trees to protect a deforested watershed. Most observers would just shrug and say, "That's nice." But a decade later, Tamara Mohr, team leader for Strategic Cooperation at the Both ENDS Foundation, the organization that provided the money, returned to discover that the little project had mushroomed into an effort that has provided clean drinking water to the entire community.

"We don't always go back to see what has happened," said Mohr. "Then you find out that the whole community has access to water. Not only that, but now they understand where their water comes from. There's the consciousness-building aspect.

The knock on small community grants is that they are too small to amount to much. They offer mere band-aids to a severely wounded world. Proponents of small grants

counter using terms like “flexibility,” “diversity” and “agility” – the latter especially in response to unexpected emergencies. “It is not so much about the money but about what people are doing,” said Mohr. “If community people opposing the Belo Monte dam (in the Brazilian Amazon) need to sit together to develop a proposal, they need to pay for hotels and bus fares. The money is instrumental. I don’t believe that small grants are going to take over the world, but a little bit of money means a lot to the local people. Where else are you going to find US\$500?” Large donors are not set-up, by vocation or operationally, to manage small outlays to far-flung communities.

Like the urban acupuncture theory of the renowned city planner Jaime Lerner, who defends focused interventions to create a multiplier effect to revitalize troubled neighborhoods, small grants can provide just the right spark when one is needed. And the butterfly effect (the scientific theory by which a small change in a non-linear system can make an outsized difference down the line) can often be deliberately encouraged. Like when Both ENDS gave a small grant to a group in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, called Probioma, for biological pest control. Not only did the Bolivians safely clear bacteria, wasps and fungi from their fields, but they spelled out everything in a manual for others – not only in Bolivia, but around the world through Drynet, an international network of civil society organizations that work to influence dryland policies in over a dozen countries.



The acronym ENDS in Both ENDS stands for “ENvironment and Development Service,” while the modifier “both” highlights its mission to make connections between nature and people, global and local, the environment and development, and – perhaps most refreshingly – between plain old resistance to bad stuff and backing innovative solutions. Though it provides grants, or channels them on behalf of larger organizations, including governments (to the tune of EUR 1.5 million to over 90 initiatives and projects in 2010), the Amsterdam-based foundation takes pains to take the stance of a partner rather than a patron. “We don’t like to be seen as a donor,” said Mohr. “We try to support organizations as they try to find their own money. We have a network of donors in the Netherlands, and we help groups formulate proposals. Some have been adopted by Cordaid or the Netherlands Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Many become partners. Lots of small groups would never make it there otherwise.” She added, “We want to be part of a movement. It is not that (we in) the Netherlands have the answer.”

Watering Democracy

The ancient Romans had better water quality than half of the people alive today, says the U.S.-based non-profit Water.org. Nearly 900 million people lack access to safe water supplies, about one in eight human beings, according to the United Nations. More than 3.5 million people a year die from water-related disease, says the World Health Organization.

In rural Central America, citizens have stopped waiting for governments and international donors to provide access to clean water. They are organizing themselves into groups called Water Boards to build, maintain and operate their own water supply systems. Over 30,000 of these self-governing, community-owned utilities provide running water to millions of people in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador and Belize. “The people own the systems, without the

government,” noted Jorge Mora Portuguez, secretary of the Freshwater Action Network Central America (FANCA).

FANCA was founded in 2003 to bring together groups in the region working on water and sanitation issues and to help them in their work, including the promotion and support of Water Boards as a solution to inadequate access to water. FANCA’s 280 members include non-governmental organizations and Water Boards. Affiliated with the London-based international Freshwater Action Network (FAN), FANCA works on all aspects of the water issue and the water cycle. FANCA members buy land in the mountains to protect water sources, lobby for legislation to facilitate the creation and operation of water boards, and conduct capacity building programs. The leaders of the Water Boards “know the necessities,” said Mora Portuguez. “But they don’t have access to credit. We try to support them and their organizations to obtain resources. If they have a broken pump, it takes a lot of time to find US\$ 5,000 to fix it.”

FANCA has managed small grants to local communities on behalf of international partners such as the Alliance for Water and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Now it wants to establish its own program. “We have served as an intermediary between the grantees and small groups,” said Mora Portuguez. “We help the local groups with their proposals. We looked at it all, and we decided to try to create our own fund.” Added Vanessa Dubois Cisneros, FANCA project officer: “Our members have other necessities. We were thinking about how to help them, and we thought that maybe small grants could be the answer.”



In preparation for a pilot project in a selected country in 2012, the FANCA brain trust is working out how to design and manage the fund, including – not incidentally – how to raise money and manage the capital. “Transparency and accountability” stand as prerequisites, according to Mora Portuguez. In practical terms this translates into, among other things, the creation of a board of directors that will include, along with FANCA members, other respected and influential individuals. At the same time, the organization is polling its members to see how much they might be willing to pay as membership fees to help establish the fund. They also hope to get matching funds from outside sources.

FANCA is also contemplating the idea of providing some or all of the cash as loans rather than grants. As the loans are paid back, the fund would be replenished, thus helping to ensure its financial stability. The loan scheme would also avoid the creation of a “give/give culture in relationship to the Water Boards,” as Dubois Cisneros put it, “to not be paternalistic.” Since the boards charge fees for water delivery, they presumably can generate enough cash to repay loans.

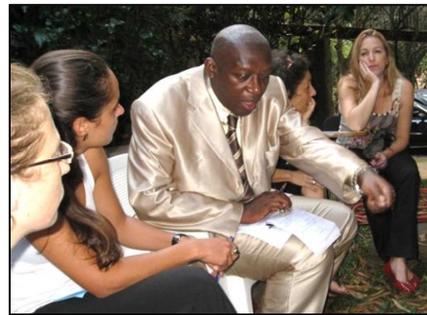
During the planning process, FANCA has relied on the backing of the Amsterdam-based Both ENDS Foundation. “To have this kind of fund is strategic, a question of life or death, for a group like FANCA,” said Mora Portuguez, “especially with the international crisis. Central America is not a priority for donors now, instead it is Africa and Asia.”

The Facts for Change in Africa

Africa's civil society organizations need to address one problem before they can tackle others, in the view of Honoré Ndoumbe Nkotto, national coordinator of the Cameroon Foundation of Rational Actions and Training for the Environment (FOCARFE being the acronym in French). "Many NGOs take an emotional approach," he said. "But instead they need to base their lobbying and advocacy work on clear data. They need to start collecting data using the scientific method. You can divide African organizations into two groups: those who find their voice by using facts and those who just start shouting."

Beginning with an urban neighborhood solid waste collection project in 1991 and branching out more than a decade later to landmark work to help communities affected by the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, FOCARFE owes its success to this "just the facts" attitude, in Ndoumbe Nkotto's opinion. In support of people displaced by the pipeline, the group started with the World Bank's own principle that no affected person should end up worse off than before. They systematically analyzed the market value of harvested crops, the cost of comparable land elsewhere, and added factors like the period it would take between planting a mango tree and when it would begin to bear fruit. "I did a study," said Ndoumbe Nkotto. "That is better than just shouting." Based on FOCARFE's careful and systematic work, over 4,000 displaced farmers received additional benefits.

For several years FOCARFE has applied this method to the management of small grants in partnership with the London-based Gatsby Foundation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Amsterdam-based group Both ENDS. Now FOCARFE plans to launch its own small grants initiative. "We are at the take-off stage," said Ndoumbe Nkotto.



Ndoumbe Nkotto explained the reasoning behind the small grants initiative. "You go into a community for a specific project, and other issues are brought to your attention," he noted. "But you do not have the means to address them because your budget is limited."

In addition, because of its success, FOCARFE is also often contacted by nascent groups looking for direction – not only in Cameroon but also in Chad, Congo, Central African Republic and Gabon. "After 20 years, many young organizations come to us," said Ndoumbe Nkotto. "They are doing good things, but we don't have the means to help. It is important for us to help people in other countries."

FOCARFE believes that a homegrown small grants program can help address these needs. "The idea is to have the means," said Ndoumbe Nkotto.

Supporting Young Environmental Leaders

At 45 this beekeeper had some mileage on him. With two decades of experience under his belt, he knew his stuff and had something to teach others about proper honey production. But he only spoke Tamil, common enough language in the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent but hardly elsewhere. A little training could go a long way. So the people at the JWH Initiative agreed to shoehorn him into their definition of "young" and gave him one of their grants for up-and-coming environmental leaders. He studied

English and took a computer course. With that, he wrote a manual. There was even money left over for him to travel to neighboring districts to conduct training workshops.

That might not be a typical JWH Initiative grant, but it is an emblematic one. The program reflects the vision of its benefactor Joke Waller-Hunter, the JWH of the organization's name, and one of the leading figures in the global environmental movement at the end of the 20th century. She served as the first director of sustainable development at the United Nations. She played a high profile role at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. She earned the nickname Mother of Kyoto for her role in the international climate change talks. And when she died in 2005 she left some money to Both ENDS, an Amsterdam-based organization, with instructions that it be used to help environmental groups in developing countries and, especially, to help them develop leaders.

Two years later, the JWH Initiative was born. The fund started providing grants of between EUR 2,500 and EUR 10,000 - to 17 individuals in 2007, a number which steadily rose over the years, to double that by 2010. The total amount disbursed grew to EUR 150,000 per year. The most common grants are for language study, university or other schooling courses, exchange programs and internships. Dawit Desta, a 30-year old Ethiopian environmental activist who had been unable to go to college, got the



chance to prepare his application for a university place to study government administration and development and begin his higher education. Two 30-something employees of a Vietnamese national park studied English, did internships in India, and returned home to disseminate what they had learned. A special pilot program gave young urban artists in Cape Town, South Africa, training in environmental issues that served as the raw material for performance pieces - using theater and hip-hop - to convey the lessons to a wider audience.

"I find it terrible to see so many good people, especially the young, who are talented and motivated but end up frustrated by the lack of options and education that would allow them to fulfill their potential," said Eva Schmitz, JWH Initiative coordinator. "People work hard but they are beaten down. The idea with this initiative is to create opportunities for people who know what they want."

The Roots of Forest Power

Few groups would seem more forsaken in an untransformed, yet globalized world than tribal forest women in Southeast Asia. Ignored by the market because they have no money to buy and nothing to sell. Ignored by politicians because they can't or don't vote or protest. Ignored even by well-meaning non-governmental organizations and foundations because they are just so damn hard to reach.

Enter stage left, the Non Timber Forest Products – Exchange Program (NTFP-EP). The organization does a lot, but in sum it strives to conserve the forest while also improving the quality of life of forest peoples. It offers capacity-building programs, notably in the recovery and improvement of traditional skills. It helps locals gain legal title to traditional lands. It helps forest people fight battles against logging and mining companies in the political and legal realms. It provides assistance for enterprise development, product development and quality, and marketing. And it does this in lots

of places: the Philippines, Malaysia, western Indonesia, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Western and Eastern Ghats in India.

While the organization is not specifically dedicated to gender issues, it is with women that it has made some of its most remarkable strides. This is partly because enterprise development projects like crafts production usually focus on them. “Normally poor women are treated just as objects,” said Benilda Camba, NTFP task force enterprise development coordinator. The initiatives help them learn how to produce, market, sell and ship their wares. With that “they are able to boost their self-confidence,” she added. “It is more than the additional income.” Some participants are truly transformed. They become more concerned with personal hygiene and how they look, more confident about going out to see friends, and even more willing to act politically – for example, by launching an effort to eliminate the dowry system. “The first time we went there, nobody wanted to talk,” said Camba. “But now they talk to buyers when they come to visit.”

In 2007, in partnership with the Netherlands Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the NTFP-EP added a small grant facility to its mix of interventions. An average of 10 grants a year, for up to EUR 5,000, are made for projects related to resource management, land tenure, livelihood and efforts to combat destructive activities by outside actors – the latter often on the spur of the moment. The approval process is very agile; if necessary funds can be dispersed in about a month. In 2011, the IUCN agreement ran its course and Brussels-based group Broederlijk Delen picked up the ball to provide funds through 2014.



The grant program is often linked closely to other NTFP-EP work. “We provide micro-grants as part of a bigger effort, for example to do marketing,” said Camba. “Before we could teach but not provide capital. The micro-grant was the best facility. We were able to get feedback, inquiries and sales abroad.”

One emblematic grant is helping the United Tribes of Palawan (NATRIPAL) complete a heritage museum for three tribes – the Batak, Paláwan and Tagbanua - in an ecotourism destination called Puerto Princesa City. The initiative has three goals: to promote indigenous culture; to provide another attraction for tourists who visit the region for its wildlife spotting, diving and unmatched underground river; and to garner business for the crafts store, which happens to be downstairs.

São Paulo Small Grants Exchange 2011

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