

YOU CAN CONNECT THE DOTS FOR GLOBAL PHILANTHROPY

Data is something we all want. Data, though, is not something we can all have...well, not right now at least. In order for data to be collected, processed, analyzed, and eventually shared—all while taking into account individual country contexts around the world—the data has to exist in the first place. This may seem obvious, but it is often a fundamental oversight globally. For example, we simply don't know the impact that foundations in Kenya are having on a sector like health, or what funds they are directing to various issues, and how that compares to the impact and spending by government programs or international aid. As a result, we have no way of knowing if philanthropy is making a difference or if there's a way that these dollars could be used more effectively. This is not just the case for Kenya, but in countries across the global North and South. The reason we do not have a complete picture of the philanthropy sector's contribution, and its role within the development ecosystem is because there is a lack of data culture and data skills. It's not just a small gap, but a pretty big one. Unfortunately, data is not seen as sexy, yet it is a necessity for any grantmaking or operating foundation to do its job effectively.

In order to tackle these issues, Foundation Center has developed a partnership program that it is implementing with philanthropic infrastructure organizations around the world to work to create a culture of data, build much needed data management capacity, and create and use data for more effective development and grantmaking outcomes. This program aims to strengthen local foundations, and associations of foundations, to develop their own long-term sustainable in-country data strategies, better understand and fill their capacity gaps through skill development, and highlight and provide tools to enable foundations to better work with data.

One country we have been fortunate enough to work in over recent months is Kenya. Earlier this year, with our many wonderful partners, including the Kenya Philanthropy Forum, East African Association of Grantmakers, Kenya Community Development Foundation, and the SDG Philanthropy Platform, we co-developed and organized a participatory Data Scoping Meeting to better understand the current data landscape and challenges in Kenya. During this meeting, we helped participants: establish principles for collaborative data and knowledge management, identify their biggest data challenges and needs, better leverage technology for collecting and sharing data and knowledge, and agree on a set of the most important goals and priorities pertaining to data and knowledge in their own organizations and as a sector in Kenya. One of those goals included developing a locally owned, operated and shared data portal. Read more about this meeting and how the findings may be applicable to your own work in this report from the convening.

And we didn't stop there. Next, we consolidated all of this new information into an agenda for a Data Strategy and Capacity Building Workshop in July 2016, which allowed participants to focus on the tangible development of a local data system, better understand what it actually takes to collect, process, and analyze data, as well as develop concrete action plans to deliver on the goals and priorities identified previously. This is an exciting step forward for philanthropic data globally and locally, and something we are thrilled to be a part of. The report from the Data Strategy and Capacity Building Workshop can be found here, and we are now working in Uganda and Tanzania to expand our work in East Africa. This region has been leading the way in this work toward sustainable data strategies and we hope their efforts will inspire you all to champion this cause in your own communities!

So, the next time you're doing research to guide your decision making and you're wondering why you can't find data you need—from general information about an organization to a particular program's impact or funding—ask yourself: Do you think the data exists? If not, think about how you might help to create it.

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