

International Cooperation in Non-Profit Sector: Benefits and Challenges



Summary

The non-profit sector in the V4 countries made a significant progress over the past decades. Yet, there are still issues challenging NGOs on daily basis. One of the most significant is funding, an essential precondition for every NGO to successfully fulfill its mission.

The debate aimed to address the issue of funding by donors to international NGO consortia, its benefits, effectiveness, and the challenges it presents. The main goal was to propose a set of recommendations for more effective and beneficial cooperation for all involved partners.

Participants

Moderator:

- Barbora Hořavová; Open Society Fund Prague, Czech Republic

Panelists:

- Pavol Demeš; SAIASCTS, Slovakia
- Leszek Jazdzewski; Liberté! Foundation, Poland
- Katalyn Nagy; Hungarian Europe Society, Hungary
- Jiří Sýkora; International Visegrad Fund, Czech Republic



Report

The International Cooperation in Non-Profit Sector: Benefits and Challenges panel discussed the challenges that arise when you are either a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a donor participating in projects on an international level. The panel consisted of four panelists from the four Visegrad countries: Jiří Sýkora (CZ), Katalyn Nagy (HU), Pavol Demeš (SK), and Leszek Jazdzewski (PL). The moderator, Barbora Hořavová (CZ), effectively maintained the flow of the panel by asking the panelists questions related to the benefits and challenges of working internationally in the nonprofit sector. The panel also sought to answer the question on whether cooperation has created sustainable partnerships.

Hořavová opened the panel by asking the donors how they supported international cooperation. Demeš began by stating that at this moment we are looking at cooperation thirty years after the fall of the Berlin wall. Presently, NGOs are exposed to challenges regarding their relevance, which is basically what government and business cannot fulfill. This creates the issue on how to distinguish between NGOs, government, and business. NGOs rely on volunteers and funding through various means, while businesses and government seek assistance in the means of NGOs' volunteers and know-how. In the end, donors want to see results or the, so called, final product.

Hořavová followed by asking the donors why they entertain grant applications from foreign NGOs. Sýkora stated that the principal idea of the fund was to give a voice to the people. The fund also aims at creating trust by governments and foreign donors. Nagy chimed in to say that she has been working with two organizations. The two organizations are the Hungarian Europe Society and a community garden organization that has been implementing a project by an American church organization. Through the work employment has been created, sustainable gardens have been created, and cooperation is taught among participants. The grant applications lead to results.

Jazdzewski comments on why his organization applied for international cooperation. He began by stating it is a good way to gain an additional source of funding in the beginning. It's also a good way to gain credibility. Jazdzewski mentioned how working for a small organization meant they were turned down many times but were able to build up their credibility over time. The organization tried to change politics from the outside. They used social action by collecting signatures and putting on social pressure. Jazdzewski states that one person can scare a thousand people and that the organization can be used as a tool to reach their goals.

Demeš stated that when seeking foreign assistance, you must meet the criteria of the donors. It is necessary to learn the interests of the donor and ensure your project fits them. Many donors are looking at the environment change in where you are working. Donors are also trying to be seen as coaches as well. The use of vocabulary when entering into a relationship with a donor is essential in establishing a fruitful connection. By calling grantees "partners" and saying "I want to enter into a partnership" enhances your likelihood of being successful. This helps NGOs which are normally shy and afraid of getting rejected. Hořavová commented that donors should also be clear on outcome and grantees should not waste too much time on thinking whether they should apply or not. Sýkora commented that applications should be brief, but sincere. Bear in mind that donors have to read a great number of proposals, so be straightforward.

Jazdzewski stated that if you shall have a real change, then we need to invest in schooling. We need to develop connections and create informal spaces where we can get to know one another. Finding a successful partnership is like dating in the real world, where we need to meet and build transparency. We must see if our goals match and if we can further build a relationship together. A piece of this that is often left out is choosing to end the relationship. End the relationship if it ceases to be beneficial and results in a loss of money. Nagy comments that this idea is too optimistic. Demeš stepped in to say it is tricky to generalize donors. Donors are hybrid in that they give money, but also have their own programs as well. "You prepare better projects for them if you look up and research interests and current projects of the donors," claimed Demeš. You can't be successful if you only read guidelines, you need to create a personal relationship with donors.

Hořavová closed the debate by asking all the panelists what their definition of successful international cooperation was. Jazdzewski said successful international cooperation helps him become an importer from an exporter. It allows him to be self-dependent and evolve. Demeš finds that successful international cooperation is when the grantee and donor are both happy with what they achieved at the end. Sýkora's answer is sustainability: the donor is taking a risk, and not all risks end in a success story. "International cooperation can bring openness back, which is more important than sustainability," concluded Nagy.