

## Debate: Money, Money, Money

*Nina Ilona Ellinger and Seeta Sharma*

The question: ‘What would be the best way to use ten million dollars?’ leads to many other questions when related to anti-trafficking work.

What should the money be spent on? Who should be appointed to spend the money? And, perhaps most importantly, who should be the beneficiaries? In other words, are the ten million dollars to prevent trafficking of people meant for activities to stop smuggling of people, to stop unwanted migrants, or to protect and uphold people’s rights when they move across borders and need to be protected from trafficking? Would the money be best spent on anti-trafficking work, or would it be better spent on strengthening the rights of all migrants to minimise the risk of trafficking?

As a team under DanChurchAid (DCA) South Asia, we worked together from 2006–2011 on a regional Asia programme funding migrant rights and anti-trafficking work. The organisation developed a regional pilot programme—Fighting for Rights—together with a number of Asian partner organisations, who took the clear decision to focus on upholding the rights of people moving across national borders. Partner organisations were identified in origin, transit, as well as destination countries. The programme activities covered interventions such as providing information to potential migrant workers in cooperation with local governments, and through various means including radio broadcasting and local theatre groups; and legal support to migrants in distress situations; support to homecoming migrants. This was in addition to national and international advocacy for migrants’ rights. The programme included partner organisations in nine countries who met regularly to discuss and clarify understanding, approaches and inter-connections within anti-trafficking work in the context of migrants’ rights.

### Involving Rights-Holders

If we were working together again in a joint donor capacity, we would set up systems to ensure that the ten million dollars is spent effectively—systems that not only monitor planning, budgeting and accounts—but more importantly, ensure that spending goes towards ensuring the rights of the intended right-holders—migrants and trafficked persons.

Having ten million dollars to spend on anti-trafficking work does not necessarily mean that good work will be done for trafficked persons. The purpose of funding must be clear and unambiguous, focusing on upholding people’s rights. We have seen too often that some donors have other agendas, such as prevention of illegal migration or criminalisation of sex work. So while the activities are presented as prevention of trafficking, the results may in fact ignore, or even violate people’s rights instead of upholding them and protecting the victims of human rights violations.

Rights-based work must always closely involve the people who are right-holders. Ways must be developed to involve and organise migrant workers, trafficked persons and sex workers, so they are active parties in finding solutions and identifying their needs. Money is too often spent meeting needs identified by organisations with good intentions of ‘saving’ others, but without

any explicit way of finding out if the intended beneficiaries approved or even felt they benefited.

## A Programme Approach with Donor/Non-Governmental Organisation Partnerships at the Centre

Rights-work is best done when donors and partners come together to work as a united force. Choosing partners and the combination of partners carefully is important as well as working in a proper partnership modality. Even if the roles may be the traditional ones of a funding provider and a recipient, having a ‘partner’-type relationship is crucial to meaningful rights-based work. Though money creates power in any relationship, donors must work hard to foster equality in partnerships. We would spend ten million dollars working with a long-term ‘programme approach’, in which we develop relationships and networks with clusters of organisations in order to bring about systemic change, rather than immediate benefits for a limited number of directly involved participants only. A programme approach means moving from one-off projects (which are what donors typically fund) to a programme with long-term interventions, developed and implemented in partnership with a number of likeminded organisations with different and complementary strengths. Some organisations are in a position to do coordinated advocacy at international levels. Others operate at local levels, giving key insights and working directly for rights in communities and providing much-needed services. Working together is key.

A programme approach will enable donors, experts and specialised organisations to develop a contextual analysis of an issue, thereupon prioritising a few areas on which to work with a number of different partner organisations. It would also provide scope for forging non-traditional partnerships, which means including, for instance, individual researchers, activists, governments and trade unions. At times, the work of different partners may not seem related, or partners may not see the need to work with each other. On many occasions, partners are in ‘competition’ with each other and have not together developed an analysis of the larger context, or stepped outside their ‘niche’ to explore other more holistic ways of addressing a migration and trafficking situation.

Recognising the unique value of each partner, maintaining long-term partnerships as well as non-funded partnerships, developing cooperation with other networks, building alliances and strengthening networking are therefore critical to creating synergy in the programme approach. This also includes networking beyond time-bound projects and direct partners. Long-term core funding can help free groups to achieve this, thereby encouraging new ideas, reflection and learning. This can also enable partners to overcome some of the barriers that prevent them from sharing and networking with each other. Building the capacities of partners through networking or direct inputs is a long-term investment.

A programme approach increases effectiveness, as donors encourage coordination and give long-term stable commitment to organisations. Donors should not only fund groups to work together and learn from each other—including learning from their mistakes—they should also provide core funding to these partners (the most valuable of resources for organisations), so the organisations and their staff can develop systems and capacities to deliver. In addition to organisational support, there should be sufficient funding for internal as well as external communication. Finally, we strongly suggest that the ten million dollars be spent over a long-term period, with mutual commitments for long-term cooperation. It is important to acknowledge in the cooperation agreement that human rights are only achieved after struggle, that it is difficult to

foresee the length of time needed to achieve systemic change and that success can never be guaranteed. Thus, long-term partnerships and lots of alliance building are needed. Partnership is not only about funding but also international solidarity and support when human rights defenders get into trouble. Good donors must dare to take a political stand. Ten million dollars spent in these ways, particularly through a programme approach, can achieve what perhaps even twenty million cannot.

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