**Global Drug Policy Program – Summary of Presidential Portfolio Review of October 1, 2014: Preparations for UNGASS 2016.**

This portfolio review focused on the work of the Global Drug Policy Program in preparing for the upcoming UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the drug control system to be held in the first half of 2016. Over the last year, GDPP has had a considerable investment in a strategy targeted at civil society engagement for this international meeting. Because of the context of urgency surrounding the call for the UNGASS by three Latin American governments, our program and many grantees have seized this meeting as an opportunity for bringing about meaningful discussion of drug policy impacts and reform opportunities within national governments and the UN system. With the approval of the shared framework by the Global Board, this area of work has an increasing urgency not only for our external partners, but within OSF as well.

The portfolio was defined as the collection of grants and advocacy events targeted at preparing governments and others for the upcoming UNGASS. The preparation for this portfolio review included analyses of our grantees along three distinct metrics: strategy employed (i.e. grassroots vs. high-level advocacy), geography of work, and collaboration among partners. What arose from these analyses was that this particular collection of grantees (those involved in large part with UNGASS) were often engaged in high-level advocacy and varied between producing research for others and their own direct advocacy, as opposed to being grassroots and national-level actors (which encompass a different group of GDPP grantees). Also clear was that these grantees worked internationally (e.g. at UN meetings) but had little representation in Asia and Africa to date. Finally, with respect to collaboration, it became clear that while grantees often collaborated with each other on particular projects, the larger collaboration towards a common set of UNGASS goals was lacking.

During the discussion of the portfolio review with Chris Stone, major themes arose around the effectiveness of NGO networks in bringing about change. This was particularly interesting for us, as one of our largest grantees is a consortium of drug policy organizations. During the review, it was clear that the recent charrette on drug policy and the resulting objectives around the shared framework were both an important context to situate this work. There was the expectation that the development of the ideas proposed in the shared framework would be a valuable tool to inform our program’s strategies and provide a richer international context to our thinking about the opportunities present with the UNGASS. Chris Stone’s analysis and explanation of the roles of various types of networks was useful to our program to understand some of the dynamics that we question from our grantees who manage such networks. Preparation for this portfolio review gave staff in our program important insights into the range of partners we work with on drug policy reform leading to the UNGASS, and offered us the opportunity to explore how these partners position themselves with a particular strategy as well as how they interact with each other. This exercise led to a renewed urgency about coordinating a strategy meeting among these grantees, which is now slated to happen in New York the week of January 12, 2015.

Further insights about the role of certain grantees and the strategies employed by them came about in discussion concerning the limitation of resources available to grantees in the young drug policy movement, and how OSF is often the only major funder supporting this work. This discussion centered on the cost-benefit analysis of reducing support for one group of long-supported grantees in order to broaden the field of actors within the movement. In the end, there seemed to be agreement that given the limited resources it is often a better choice to “stay the course” with a proven – yet flawed – partner, rather than starting from scratch with an unknown.

Among the unresolved questions that flowed from the portfolio review, one large one concerned how GDPP / OSF might work to increase the donor base in the drug policy field. Recognizing the fact that OSF was most likely the only supporter of this type of work, and seeing some of the challenges that arise because of this, it seems that it would serve us well to focus some energy and attention on building the donor field. That way, we might more legitimately work with our grantees to fall below the one-third threshold and, thusly, become more sustainable in the long-term. As mentioned, this particular question was not resolved in the portfolio review and might be a subject worth addressing in 2015.

Another question that was not directly discussed – and one with which our program struggles some – is the role or relationship that OSF should take with respect to our grantees’ work and strategies. Through the preparation of the analysis for this portfolio review, it became apparent that a comprehensive strategy among our UNGASS grantees was lacking. This raised questions in the portfolio review about the level of agency that OSF should take with respect to our grantees to shape their strategies towards our own program’s aims and objectives. In the end, and quite clear with the emergent shared framework strategy and objectives, OSF clearly has its own objectives and strategies for shaping the drug policy field, but those must be reconciled with the independent support that we as a donor offer to partners.

Another point for further discussion may be around the broadness of the drug policy field as a whole. Many of the existing partners have been around since the beginning of the movement and are well-established as major players in the field. This is a strong base to build a drug policy movement, but without a concerted effort at energizing more grassroots, national actors, the drug policy reform movement may hit a plateau. Again, the UNGASS is seen by many – including GDPP – as an opportunity to engage new actors in the debate about drug policy reform. These new actors may – through the shared framework – be foundations within our own network, or they may be organizations that have to date fallen below our radar. Whatever the case, it is likely that in order to take the fullest advantage of the UNGASS opportunity beyond 2016, we will need to rethink how support can be offered to these emerging voices that we are working so hard these last years to engage.

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