



The Social Impact Incubator

THE SEGAL FAMILY FOUNDATION INVESTS IN BURUNDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The Segal Family Foundation (SFF) supports over 180 organizations across 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. When SFF decided to invest in Burundi, it struggled to find the types of grantees the foundation wanted to fund— young, African-led, grassroots non-governmental organizations with localized knowledge about their communities, and innovative and creative solutions to address needs. SFF realized that the funding model created by international actors was further marginalizing an already frail civil society. SFF decided that the only way to advance their grantmaking was to build the capacity of local organizations to be leaders and change-makers, as well as inform and influence donors on the pivotal role of civil society in Burundi. To achieve this, SFF created the Social Impact Incubator.

Burundi does not receive the same international attention and funding as many of its neighbors in East Africa. “There’s a lack of donor attention,” explains SFF executive director Andy Bryant. “There’s really limited funding and the majority comes in the form of top-down investments from international non-governmental organizations and large foreign government institutions. We decided to invest in creating a more thoughtful interaction between donors and practitioners to promote a stronger civil society in Burundi, and foster collaboration and healthy partnerships.”



Key Info



COUNTRY
Burundi



TARGET POPULATION
Youth



APPROACH
Business and entrepreneurship;
Interpersonal training and networking

Although the foundation is based in New Jersey in the United States, it has a team in Burundi too. The Burundi-based SFF team established an in-country advisory board to help the foundation understand the context. This led to the conclusion that Burundi has one of the weakest civil societies in East Africa, and that the funding landscape has disenfranchised

organizations to be better positioned to address the specific needs of their beneficiaries. Although SFF has a fundamental interest in young people's rights to make healthy choices about their sexuality and reproduction, and thus tends to focus its investments on youth and women's empowerment, they feel this approach is broadly applicable. "While we think it's

"We have a philosophy of being open and encouraging difficult and diverse conversations. We ask Champions to bring friends and organizations that do not fit the mainstream. That's a good way to recruit them, in offering them a safe space." – Dedo Baranshamaje, Segal Family Foundation

local vision and leadership. SFF Burundi country director Dedo Baranshamaje explains that many Burundian organizations lost their identity and vision working solely as implementing partners, carrying out an international organization's or donor's mission. The result of these implementation-based relationships, is that programs closely resemble one another in structure and approach. SFF saw impact suffering, as programs weren't optimized to truly meet local needs.

SFF's model of philanthropy involves actively partnering with grassroots organizations. SFF director of operations Ash Lauren Rogers explains that the foundation approaches grantmaking "thinking about how we walk alongside our grantees as real partners, as allies in the fight for social justice." This means that while SFF does grantmaking, it also incubates ideas beyond simply monetary investment, but also investing as a partner in efforts. This drove SFF to develop a mechanism to equip local

really important to work with these audiences, SFF believes this funding lens can be applied to work across all sectors and improve ultimate impact potential," Dedo explains.

SFF created the Social Impact Incubator (SII) to catalyze local organizations to think creatively, to innovate, and to work closely with their beneficiaries to design programs that are based on their needs. The SII aims to create a common space for local organizations, international NGOs, and donors, to connect, collaborate and openly dialogue. Ash shares that although the immediate intention is to strengthen civil society,





“The SII also aspires to influence international NGOs and major funders in the country that the role of grassroots organizations

ought to be creating innovative solutions, based on the needs in their own communities.”

The SII participating organizations, called Champions, undergo weekly training sessions that cover a variety of topics, including strategy planning, fundraising, project planning, financial management, monitoring, and communication. The SII begins with a rapid

years to submit applications. In 2013, SFF received 50 applicants and accepted twelve organizations. In 2014, SFF received 170 applications and accepted 22 organizations. In 2015, the SII will continue to grow and accept 30 organizations. The SII has become sustainable on its own in that most of the 2015 Champions came from recommendations from previous cohorts.

Part of this growth can be attributed to international NGOs that approached SFF about getting involved in the SII as partners. After the first year, in which SFF implemented the SII on its own, CARE Burundi joined the SII as a training partner. Thanks to this collaboration, the seven-month training program grew to incorporate more individualized capacity-building programs. In 2015, CARE Burundi and SFF

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assessment of their Champions to gather information and track progress, and be able to better connect them with the resources they need. The assessment is followed by six months of training, field visits, and mentorship. Organizations are paired with a mentor to help them think through their work and provide connections when possible. The advisory board provides mentoring and has helped with recruitment.

SFF advertises the SII through both local and international networks in Burundi, inviting interested organizations that have been operating less than five

will be joined by Action Aid and run the SII as a consortium. This will help to expand the thematic focus to include trainings on agriculture and advocating for human rights.

Additional growth of the SII has been prompted by Champions. In 2014, 34 Champions launched their own Alumni Engagement Network. Andy adds, “SFF is obviously supporting the Alumni Engagement Network now, but Champions came together of their own accord, organically. The first two cohorts wanted to continue relationship-building with one another

and to look for joint funding opportunities.” This Champion-led, continued engagement is exactly the kind of outcome SFF hoped to see emerge from the SII.

Ash explains that the SII was designed with three intended outcomes: (1) to build the capacity of individual organizations; (2) to build cohesion, trust, and community among participating organizations and funding entities; (3) and to influence the funding landscape in Burundi to be more driven by civil society. “Our hope is that, over time, donors will be able to shift some of their funding practices to be more flexible and to support local ideas and local missions.”

One measure of the overall success of the SII is how successful Champions are in receiving future funding, not only from SFF, but also from other

relatively easy, as donors are more interested in funding a grassroots organization that has been through the SII than one that hasn’t.

Champions have the opportunity to win small grants during the SII, via Learning Challenges. At the end of each training module, SFF asks participating organizations to present an idea that embodies what they have learned, for the chance to win a small pot of funding from SFF to implement program activities. “This seems to be really helpful, especially for tiny organizations. Being able to manage a grant of



“Being able to manage a grant of \$2,500 or \$5,000 adds legitimacy to their work.” – Dedo Baranshamaje, Segal Family Foundation

donors. In 2013, nearly \$1 million was invested in Champions by outside funders. Of the 32 Champions that participated between 2013 and 2014, six became new SFF grantees, known as All-stars. Dedo explained that a lot of SFF’s investment goes into the networking component of the SII, to bring Champions and funders together. The SII builds the capacity of Champions to be able to lead those conversations and develop new relationships with potential partners, donors, and other stakeholders. Dedo shared that making the connections has been

\$2,500 or \$5,000 adds legitimacy to their work,” explains Ash.

One example of the impact of the learning challenge is from an organization called SaCoDé. SFF met Françoise Nibizi when she joined the first cohort of Champions in 2013. She had just started SaCoDé, a Burundian NGO that empowers and helps vulnerable women and youth. SFF staff recall her being dynamic and having a huge vision, but lacking the organizational structure and support to bring it

to fruition. Françoise won one of the first Learning Challenges in 2013 by developing an SMS-based platform to inform young people about reproductive health topics via text message. She then organized these young people into groups and brought them together to discuss the messages and to connect them to youth-friendly services. Françoise has since established three youth friendly centers that provide sexual and reproductive health information and services, including family planning services and

sexually transmitted infection testing.



Through the SII, SaCoDé was able to launch Burundi's first SMS reproductive health program geared towards youth and, as of April

2015, it now operates in all 17 provinces in Burundi. In addition, SaCoDé has created 90 new jobs for youth and vulnerable women. This is just one example of how SFF's initial intervention—starting the SII to strengthen local grassroots organizations—spawned an initiative that not only reaches youth and promotes informed sexual decision-making, but also empowered the female founder of that initiative to develop her idea and bring it to scale.

SFF was able to implement the SII thanks to having a team in Burundi. They had existing in-country

Results of the Social Impact Incubator

A SII evaluation completed in June 2015 revealed several successes, including:



78 percent of SII alumni organizations increased their revenue after the graduation



50 donor connections were directly attributed to SII totaling \$1,850,000 of increased funding




65 percent of SII alumni organizations have increased their staff size since graduating



81 percent of SII alumni gained new partners as a result of the incubator

relationships, and therefore were able to more easily attract grassroots organizations seeking to overcome the funding landscape challenges and be in a position to have a stronger presence. "We have a really good localized context understanding of development trends and development actors, and in addition to that understanding of the situation, we can be reactive to the contextual needs of our partners," shares Andy. "If you are funding from a distance, parachuting in for diligence visits only on rare occasions, it's harder to develop that relationship of trust with your partner, so of course you're going to build parameters and restrictions."



SFF fundamentally believes that local solutions are the most appropriate and sustainable, and that smaller and younger organizations can benefit most from the SII. “It’s a very exciting project. The impact we’re seeing on the ground in terms of collaboration and trust is very exciting and exemplifies how far

we’ve come in two years,” Dedo shares. “We still have a long way to go to achieve the third layer— influencing the donor landscape in Burundi—but our progress to date is teaching us to continue to be more and more ambitious with each SII cohort.”

Strengthening grassroots efforts empowers both the women who drive them and the underserved populations that can benefit from their work.

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This case study was written by Virginia Zuco and developed for Foundation Center's Equal Footing project.

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