



Building Trust Through Formal and Informal Networks

KING BAUDOIN FOUNDATION SHARES HOW NETWORKS HELP A SMALL TEAM MANAGE A LARGE PORTFOLIO

The King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), based in Belgium, has funded more than 100 projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ranging from 10,000 EUR one-year grants to multi-year grants up to 200,000 EUR. With less than two full-time staff dedicated to managing programs in Central Africa (DRC and Burundi), finding strategic efficiencies is important. Creating a network of trusted partners and collaborators has been essential for KBF to strategically manage its sizable and growing portfolio. Being a part of formal and informal networks helps to inform KBF's grantmaking and find partners that better align with its mission: to help to improve living conditions for the population.

Working in the DRC, a former Belgian colony, is an important part of KBF's overall strategy, as is the case for many Belgian donor and implementing organizations. Besides the deep and fruitful (and sometimes difficult) relations between the two countries, the presence of many Belgian-based organizations has created an informal network that stretches from Belgium to the DRC, driving collaboration and informing partnerships. Funders connect with one another to flag organizations that fit various funding criteria, and



Key Info

**COUNTRY**

Democratic Republic of Congo

**TARGET POPULATION**

Low income

**APPROACH**

Financial inclusion

to hone strategies to more acutely meet needs. KBF project manager for Africa and developing countries, Hervé Lisoir, shares that this has influenced the funding landscape in the DRC: “Being networked is a valuable attribute for grantseekers. I remember a



very small, local community-based organization from the province of Bas-Congo that heard of KBF through another, larger Congolese organization. This small organization worked to develop its own

network of contacts, despite its limited resources, to connect to KBF. Civil society organizations are adapting as they realize the important role that introductions and recommendations have in garnering funding.”

KBF provides grants in several thematic areas—poverty, health, development, civic engagement, and cultural heritage—through the more than 400 funds

and select candidates to receive grants. Members of these committees become uniquely positioned to understand KBF’s grantmaking strategy and can also advise the foundation on new, fitting partnerships.


When the foundation established the Marie-Antoinette Carlier Fund in 2009 from a legacy contribution, it invited trusted peer funders with deep ties in Central Africa to join the management committee with the intent of improving collaboration, communication, and information sharing. Alain Philippson, of Fondation Marie et Alain Philippson (Philippson Foundation), was invited to join the fund’s management committee. In 2013, thanks to a recommendation by the Philippson Foundation, KBF was introduced to and began funding APPUI CONGO. “Alain knew the grantee would be a good fit for KBF because the Philippson Foundation itself had been closely involved with APPUI CONGO since 2009. Alain could speak to their mission, strategy, and leadership with firsthand knowledge,” shares Hervé. KBF, who works with men, women, and youth, wanted to more strategically invest in young women and girls. This partnership offered KBF the opportunity to support a grantee with women and girls at the forefront of its initiatives.

“More than 90 percent of Congolese grantees have come to the foundation

via one of our various networks.” – Hervé Lisoir, King Baudouin Foundation

that it manages. When donors create a fund within the KBF, it establishes a management committee comprised of an independent chairperson and representatives for the various funders donating to the fund. Management committees review proposals

APPUI CONGO (meaning “support Congo” in French) is an acronym for Action Participative pour un Progrès Unifié et Intégré en RDC (participatory action for integrated and unified progress in the DRC) and is a Congolese organization that works to empower



and protect women and girls. APPUI CONGO works in the Katanga province of the DRC implementing a program called Washawasha, which aims to help women and girls become financially autonomous. Washawasha brings women and girls together to set up savings and loans associations. In addition to accessing and learning how to manage capital, Washawasha provides women with trainings on

work would not have been fully understood, and therefore supported, by KBF alone until very recently; the networked referral made the difference in accelerating understanding and funding.

Funding an organization that comes through a referral and has a track record of implementing successful programming provides reassurance over

“We need to work together to build fruitful partnerships and build trusted networks to improve collaboration and in turn the impact of projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” – Hervé Lisoir, King Baudouin Foundation

various topics ranging from health, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, and malnutrition, to women’s rights, including gender-based violence. Washawasha also provides specific trainings for young girls, ages 13 to 18, on reproductive health, personal hygiene, relationships with parents/adults, early marriage, motherhood, and other topics.

KBF looks for projects that tackle difficult issues with creative and innovative approaches. If a project is unprecedented and doesn’t fit the bill for typical funders, that is more appealing to KBF and tends to impress management committees. One aspect of APPUI CONGO that stood out to KBF was that the organization also generates financing through its own income-generating activities to improve its sustainability. APPUI CONGO builds and sells fuel-efficient stoves, produces Moringa, an herb used to supplement malnutrition and related deficiencies such as anemia, and manufactures and sells Batik cloths. The breadth of APPUI CONGO’s

something unknown. Hervé clarifies: “Networks and recommendations are very important, but alone are not sufficient. Connection doesn’t guarantee funding, but a recommendation can help one organization stand out over another and can open the door to conversation.” Grantee vision, leadership, and capacities are the key criteria, in addition to meeting proposal and budget guidelines. “We are often put in the position of having to reject projects recommended by trusted partners due to the amount of proposals we receive compared to the funding available. But, we do what we can. And, a strong recommendation is likely to have a bigger impact on a very small grant, whereas a recommendation for a multi-year, large grant is only going to be one aspect of a three-year 200,000 EUR proposal. We are a team of two and we follow up with more than 100 projects in Africa and developing countries, so collaborating with and trusting information from our Congolese, Belgian, and other international partners allows us to accomplish all that we do.”

Collaboration and exchange proves to be a powerful resource for funders to inform strategy and find fitting grantees.

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

Photographs provided courtesy of the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF).

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