



# CONVERGENCES

SOLIDARITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: **2015**  
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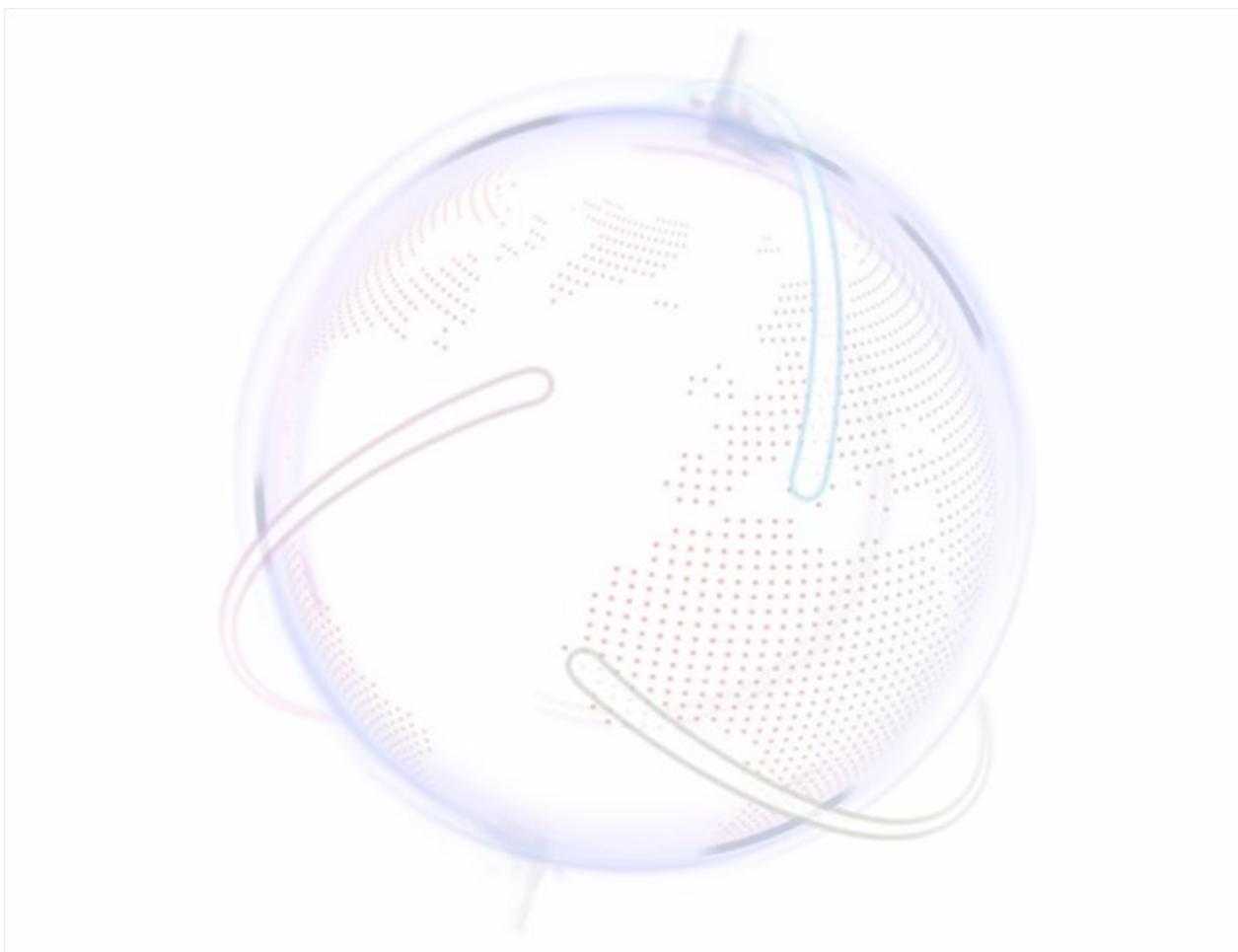
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Fourth part

## Improving impact



improving practices improving impact improving investment

# Collaborative impact: How to stimulate collaboration between the different actors to optimize social impact?

Round table // International cooperation



## Moderator

**Alexandre De Carvalho**  
Network Partner, Hystra Consulting

## Speakers

**Serge Allou**  
Institutional development, stakeholders, and territories Program Manager, GRET

**Jake Benford**  
Project Manager, Bertelsmann Foundation

**Ziggy Garewal**  
Country Director, ACTED Afghanistan

**Jennifer Vasquez**  
Senior Director, SEEP

## Executive summary

The issue of “collaborative impact” follows on the initiative of FSG, an international consulting firm specializing in social innovation. The FSG argues that social impact can be maximized if a group of organizations work together towards a common goal. Therefore, collective efforts should have more impact than individual efforts.

Compared to “isolated impact”, “collaborative impact” looks at social problems in a broader framework and develops solutions by encouraging different organizations to interact.

Social progress depends on the will of the different stakeholders to work towards the same goals and learn from their collaboration, regardless of their divergences. Nevertheless, creating a common approach shared by all actors is much more difficult than it seems.

## Synthesis

Having a common agenda is a way to maximize social impact. **Alexandre De Carvalho** introduced the topic saying that, when many stakeholders work together, they tend to share the same vision and a common understanding of the issue. Social impact can therefore be optimized. He asked the panelists how a common approach can help solve social problems.

**Ziggy Garewal** explained that having a common agenda is a key issue. In Afghanistan, there are multiple stakeholders: beneficiaries, local/national/international NGOs, UN organizations, the government of Afghanistan at national/regional/local levels, foreign governments, international development organizations, military actors, private sector actors, etc. The diversity of the stakeholders (who can have different motives) can often be a deal breaker.

When an NGO is sitting at the same table as a military actor, a common agenda is critical to avoid misunderstandings. Stakeholders can miss out on many opportunities simply because there is a lack of trust amongst partners or because they do not understand enough about their respective reasons for being partners. They also need to be aware that one organization cannot perform all the functions or achieve all the results alone.

**Ziggy Garewal** spends 80% of her time building collaboration, networking, and setting up a common ground with other stakeholders. The key to building a common agenda is to make sure that each player can participate equally in the discussion. Building a common agenda is absolutely essential and must be considered the first step of any program.

**Jennifer Vasquez** explained **SEEP's** mission, which is to connect microenterprise practitioners with a global learning community. SEEP gathers the experience of practitioners in an inclusive, neutral space for sharing and developing knowledge, and disseminates this knowledge broadly to make the microenterprise development industry progress. SEEP members are leaders of the industry. International microfinance associations account for over 80% of their members. They often provide training, services, and institutional strengthening to MFIs operating on the ground. SEEP engages with diverse global members and establishes strategic alliances with other key stakeholders.

Two examples were provided:

- Youth Financial Services PLP – Bring together a Private Actor – MasterCard and For-Profit Organizations – Making Cents on Youth Financial;
- Our Citi Network Strengthening Program – a collaborative project with Citi, SEEP and its Associated Members.

SEEP is well positioned to better understand the dynamics in relationship building. They act as a bridge builder for broader collaboration, by assessing which actors share a common agenda and what resources they can use to maximize social impact. **Jennifer Vasquez** is convinced that actors have to work together to achieve faster results and to avoid the duplication of efforts. SEEP knows the importance of working collaboratively, of sharing the same goals and agenda with its partners, and of identifying the best practices.

It is critical to understand each others' roles and responsibilities and to

determine a road map and an effective strategy for greater impact to avoid any diversion in the mission. It is important to understand that each actor has their own organizational mission and this is one of the biggest challenges in building this common agenda and in making actors work together. Synergy has to be created between the different actors, and collaboration must have a mutually beneficial value to be successful.

**Serge Allou** added that, as an external actor, it is sometimes difficult for **GRET** to bring everybody around the table. The case of Mauritania is interesting in this regard. Indeed, one actor – the "Commissariat de la lutte contre la pauvreté" (Commissioner for poverty alleviation) – did not want to speak with the Ministry of Housing hence making their collaboration impractical. One wanted to focus on fighting poverty; yet the GRET agenda (regarding housing) also included attempting to strengthen social actors and public policies.

**Ziggy Garewal** added that it is hard to bring actors around the table as there is a lot of wariness. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is a very complex operating environment where working alone is very dangerous. Communication channels must be kept open to all the parties involved to ensure no actor is isolated. In the Afghan context, actors are beginning to understand each other, and to work together.

Collective data helps to measure efforts and progresses within a joint project. **Alexandre De Carvalho** introduced the idea that 'collective data' and 'measuring results' constantly enable all participants to ensure that the effort remains in line with the objectives.

**Jake Benford** explained the learning process that the **Bertelsmann Foundation (BF)** went through when it started looking at the field of collaborative action and impact measurement. The basic objective behind impact measurement is to improve impact and to be able to show other actors what your plan is in order to attract more funding. In Germany as well as in the UK, there is little knowledge and very few tools available for organizations to use such measurement analyses. If a given methodology of impact measurement is to be applied, the data need to be put in data systems. However, they first need to be gathered in the field. Else, even the best methodology will not produce any results.

It is clear that actors need to increase exchanges and work together. BF membership network was set up to enable a collaborative approach. It was established as a community of practitioners. This network enables non-profit organizations to post their own agenda and decide what needs to be done. BF does not advocate for a methodology that is universally applicable. Methodology should be tailored to each local context. The aim of this network is really to provide people with a platform where they can share national and international analyses, and develop the field of social impact.

In addition, **Jake Benford** said that some impacts are really hard to measure in the field (i.e. skills measurement for teenagers). Actors must at least agree on what might be the right indicator for a given sector, then information can start being gathered and systems of measurement filled.

Impact measurement is a long term project, depending on the indicators, the sector, and on what the stakeholders need to assess. It can take 10 years to measure some impacts (for instance, in the field of education, the impact of teaching to young people or students' access to the job market). Indicators have to be valid, reliable, practical, politically feasible, and realistic. As soon as assessment includes indicators, it has an impact on the results.

**Ziggy Garewal** added that one of the key issues is to distinguish results and impact. The issue of "shared measurement" has to be linked to that of a "common agenda" with the necessity to define shared objectives, conditions, and indicators of the operations.

In Afghanistan, **ACTED** tried to achieve better governance and better stability. But how does one measure that? When a lot of NGOs are building a massive national program, it can take 5 to 6 years to set out the basic results indicators (indicators have to be defined and measured). It is a long yet critical process as stakeholders are not used to implementing this kind of methodology.

**Jennifer Vasquez** added that the SEEP structure allows for greater collaboration between the private and the public sectors through the Communities of Practice (COP) model. It spurs greater member commitment and greater learning based on common objectives. For instance, 3 COPs are organized, addressing cross-sector areas of interest, planning, production, marketing,

dissemination, and finally measurement and assessment of social impact.

**Jennifer Vasquez** said that communication is extremely challenging and that, for a global network like SEEP, several barriers like the language remain. SEEP takes the local context of collaborative initiatives into account and creates a communication strategy to synthesize knowledge, updates, and best practices in such a way that field practitioners can understand and enforce them. SEEP developed a coherent communication strategy with a great deal of input from its members and began to pull off the best ways to disseminate the information to provide exposure for the programs. As part of the collaboration with Citi and various microfinance associations, SEEP created a set of tools, including technical notes, toolkits, and guides, designed specifically for associations. The strategy consists essentially in making sure that all of the actors involved actually communicate, and then in being able to dispatch their message to the stakeholders of the project.

SEEP benefits from a dynamic membership base, with both microfinance associations (looking at metrics and numbers) and enterprises (looking at social performance aspects of activities). SEEP makes sure both can understand each other.

**Serge Allou** added that, when you have a series of actors around the table, not everybody is in a position to speak. When you have power issues



between the actors, discussion is not clearly established. Thus, to build a common agenda and take part in the communication and negotiation processes, people must be in a position to talk to each other. This, however, is not always the case and intermediaries are needed to ease the discussion. **Serge Allou** reminded that GRET, as a development NGO, tries to build relationships between social actors and the public sphere as much as possible. It is critical to consider the State a major actor of development.

**Alexandre De Carvalho** said that each stakeholder generally has its own issues and its own responsibilities, while at the same time something is bringing all stakeholders together and trying to encourage positive collaborations. It is key to rely on a solid organization with a staff that is constantly monitoring efforts and measuring results along with other organizations.

For **Ziggy Garewal**, having a strong organization is critical, because networking, collaboration, etc., are not spontaneous activities. They require a lot of hard work and support. Regarding the building of a communication strategy, it is essential to rely on a structure, forums of discussions, and meetings that allow people with different opinions to be involved in the process, beside colleagues' feedbacks and the circulation of information.

In Afghanistan, there are about 500 registered NGOs. The Agency called "Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief" (ACBAR) represents 120 NGOs. It serves and facilitates the work of its members in order to address efficiently and effectively the Afghans' humanitarian and development needs. ACBAR plays a key role in Afghanistan, providing information to its members and external stakeholders (such as donors, multilateral organizations, and the media). Its ability to pass on information to its

members and to coordinate them is highly appreciated, all the more as NGOs have different sizes, mandates, budgets, activities, and areas of intervention. ACBAR created a common platform for actors. NGOs do not necessarily have the time to collaborate. Therefore, external actors dedicated to coordination are needed to support the collaboration process.

To effectively strengthen its activities, SEEP aligns goals with their partners and includes everyone's work into their program. In SEEP's experience, the best mutual reinforcement of activities is through regional summits and training courses.

Official rapporteur:

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