



African Resource Mobilization Webinar Series

Transcript of 3rd March 2021 webinar on
Creating High-Impact Relationships:
How to Develop Partnerships with US Foundations & Philanthropists

Speakers:

Lisa Issroff, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Issroff Family Foundation

Tatu Gatere, Co-Founder & CEO of Buildher

Moderator: Liz Ngonzi, Founder & CEO of The International Social Impact Institute

00:01:02-00:02:56: HAFEEZA RASHED: Hello and welcome! I am Hafeeza Rashed, the Senior Advisor, Communications and Outreach at the King Baudouin Foundation United States. It's great to be here and thanks for taking the time attend the first webinar in the African Resource Mobilization Webinar Series. For those who are not familiar with the KBFUS, please allow me a brief word. The King Baudouin Foundation United States facilitates thoughtful, effective giving to Europe and Africa. We enable US donors to support their favorite causes overseas. We also provide European and African nonprofits with cost effective solutions to raise funds in the United States through a tool we call an American Friends Fund. We have over 450 American Friends funds, including University of Nairobi, the Harare International Festival of the Arts, and the Magdi Yacoub Heart Foundation among others. These funds save nonprofits the trouble and expense of setting up their own US public charity. KBFUS handles all back-office administration, including tax receipts and donor support. Whether you have donors in the US, Canada, or Europe, KBFUS can help facilitate their donations to your nonprofit in Africa.

00:03:00-00:07:13: LIZ NGONZI: Thank you, Hafeeza. I've truly enjoy collaborating with you and rest of the King Baudouin Foundation United States team to develop this series over the last few months. Thank you for the opportunity to do so. Welcome everyone and thank you for taking the time to learn with us.

I am the Founder and CEO of The International Social Impact Institute that I founded last year, recognizing that the unprecedented challenges facing the social impact sector highlighted the need for focused, creative, and well-networked changemakers and social impact driven leaders to help guide the sector forward. Through initiatives with the King Baudouin Foundation United States, Nelson Mandela University (South Africa), the Arcus Foundation, and Hunter College, City University of New York, the Institute aims to amplify the voices of social impact leaders from historically marginalized communities (in the US and around the world) and facilitate interactions among such leaders and assist in training more of them.

The African Resource Mobilization Webinar Series is dear to me because it enables us to bring together many stakeholders and our incredible partners, including Candid, CIVICUS, Equity Group Holdings (EGHL), the Issroff Family Foundation (IFF), Kenya Association of Fundraising Professionals (KAFFP), Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNNGO), and the Tristate Area

Africa Funders Network. I encourage you to learn about them as they support social impact sector and offer research, educational content, networking opportunities, and funding. In speaking with our Africa based partners—including Kenya Association of Fundraising Professionals and Nigerian Network of NGOs—we learned that the challenges that organizations face when seeking to engage US based foundations and philanthropists includes geographic distance, which is exacerbated by the current travel restrictions due to Covid. There is also the fact that only ten percent of the 140,000 foundations in the US have websites. Those factors along with the cost of finding useful information rob many organizations of the opportunity to access the funding and capacity building resources offered by foundations. We also discovered that many organizations have a limited understanding about the importance of aligning their own interests with the interests of their prospective funders, which is key to developing an effective case for support. Against that backdrop, today's webinar is designed to shed light on the key elements necessary to attract, engage, and develop long-term relationships with US foundations and philanthropists.

I now would like to introduce our incredible panelists. First is my dear friend Lisa Issroff, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Issroff Family Foundation based in New York. She also heads the Tristate Area Africa Funders Network, an informal group of like-minded funders, including individuals, foundations, corporations, and consultants based in the Tri-State New York area who fund throughout Africa. Though based in the United States, Lisa originally hails from South Africa and has a grasp of the continent's challenges and of potential solutions.

Our second panelist is Tatu Gatere, the Co-Founder & CEO of Buildher. Her mission is to equip women in Kenya with accredited construction skills, leading to greater financial prosperity while changing attitudes and promoting gender equality within the construction industry.

I would like to ask our panelists to tell a bit about themselves before we go into the panel discussion. Lisa, please share a bit about the IFF and how it partners with and supports early-stage leaders of community-based organizations to improve outcomes for children, youth, and their communities.

00:07:14-00:09:24: LISA ISSROFF: Hello and thank you very much. Before I jump in, I would like to thank all of the organizers for having me here. Liz, you didn't randomly find me on LinkedIn and ask me to join this panel. We became good friends, and I recall how we first met. In addition to the many roles you perform, one of them is that you are a professor. Liz was giving a course in funding and fundraising in Africa. I attended the course and was inspired by her. During the last ten years, we've developed a relationship. This short story exemplifies the way we at the Issroff Family Foundation do our work. Our work is based in our values and is very relational. We partner with early-stage organizations, and we have technical assistance programs for some of those early-stage, community-based organizations. We also like to help create networks and collaborations. We were fortunate to become co-founders the Tristate Area Africa Funders Network about five years ago.

00:09:25-00:09:40: LIZ NGONZI: Thank you, Lisa! Tatu, please tell us about your fascinating journey from being an architect to an award-winning social entrepreneur.

00:09:42-00:11:20: TATU GATERE: Thank you. I appreciate participating in this webinar. My journey has a circuitous route, so I won't go too much into it. I studied architecture in the United States, and I became puzzled about how to translate my western education to my context. Coming back home and practicing in Kenya was key for me. Community work stood out to me because there was a big gap in how the low-income community was living and the spaces designed for them. In 2015, I left commercial practice and went to Kibera to work in an organization that builds public spaces. I learned what it takes to design and consider communities. I needed to design with rather than design for. Through that exercise, I got to train youth and women. I then co-founded Buildher to try and create solutions to the issues I faced.

00:11:47-00:12:19: LIZ NGONZI: Given the various challenges identified earlier that preclude many organizations on the African continent from accessing US funders, I'd like to know your thoughts about how those connections can be made. I'd like to understand how one leverages one's relationships in order to do so. It'd be great to hear about how you two first met. Perhaps, you could provide us with some practical strategies and tips for those looking to forge similar relationships in their own context.

00:12:21- 00:13:02: TATU GATERE: I was introduced to Lisa by one of our funders who became a key advocate of our work and was looking to broaden our network. We then developed a partnership with the Issroff Family Foundation.

00:13:05- 00:13:22: LIZ NGONZI: Lisa, what have you seen in terms of effective ways that organizations have approached the IFF and those in your network?

00:13:25- 00:16:38: LISA ISSROFF: Tatu referenced a friend with have in common and who supports Buildher. One of the primary ways we learn about organizations is through the people in our network. Some of them are funders or current organizations that we support. The friend who introduced us is someone is trust and respect. I reached out to Tatu and her co-founder James to request a meeting. I then visited the Buildher site in Nairobi. I was impressed by everything I saw. At the time, the equipment to set up their warehouse was just arriving, so I could feel this excitement in the air. I also had an opportunity to sit in on a class at Buildher. It is a pity that now site visits are reduced due to Covid because it was an important part in the introduction to the organizations that we now have relationships with.

00:17:18-00:18:12: LIZ NGONZI: Let's now talk about how an organization can effectively communicate how its mission aligns with that of the prospective partner. Lisa, could you start by sharing your thoughts from the perspective of a funder? Tatu, I'd love to hear from you about what you do to make a case for support in an effective way.

00:18:16-00:21:54: LISA ISSROFF: The leaders of early-stage organizations that I've met are some of the most intelligent, passionate, committed people that I've come across. I have yet to meet a leader who says that they love fundraising, budgets, spreadsheets, and managing teams. People who start organizations are either inspired to do this work because they feel a calling to solve a challenge or they see an opportunity or a gap. From my personal experience, it's about understanding who the funders are that will be a good fit for your organization. Understand who the funders are in your ecosystem, issue area, or geographic area with whom you have a much

better chance of making a case for to those funders about why they should care about your mission. When one is approaching funders, it's important to know what they care about and what vocabulary they use to talk about their work. As people are becoming more specific, it's to one's advantage to understand the funder.

00:22:02-00:23:13: TATU GATERE: I would like to agree with Lisa. One of the critical things for me was starting to see funders as people. I got curious about what funders are focused on, how their strategies have changed over time, and the history of funding. Doing that background research has shifted results for Buildher. Understanding the background of the people I am meeting allows me to speak to their interests and expertise. It helps open up networks because we can align our interests on a personal and organizational levels.

00:23:17-00:23:22: LIZ NGONZI: Lisa, can you please define early-stage organizations?

00:23:25-00:25:23: LISA ISSROFF: We are interested in partnering with organizations that have an idea that is still evolving. Part of our theory of change is investing in a leader with a vision and a solution to a challenge but without a fixed strategy. I would be very surprised if a leader was doing the same thing ten years after they started. That would make me very suspicious. I would wonder: where is the learning? When we talk to Tatu, they're thinking about piloting a new part of the program and evolving their strategy. The needs of their community are changing rapidly over the last year or so.

00:25:24-00:26:22: LIZ NGONZI: There is a notion that an organization has to be perfect. We never want to let the funder know about any mistakes. How can we address that such that we create an environment where the organization can be transparent? How can we enable organizations to be nimble?

00:26:28-00:28:22: TATU GATERE: What we did over Covid was to communicate the shifts and changes that were happening. Funders are always interested in where you are succeeding, but you also want funders who are interested in where you are failing. This allows you to be honest about the journey. There are other relationships that I found to be crucial. It is more effective to come into that conversation when you've developed an understanding of the challenge and a proposal of how you would like to address it. Constant communication and reaching out to funders to update them on the shifts and changes happening is important.

00:28:28-00:30:29: LISA ISSROFF: Communication is the key. These are hard challenges that have not been solved yet. We have to keep trying different things. Organizations, particularly at an early stage, are going to try thing that will work, but many of them will not work. Secondly, the failure is a result of deliberate, intentional thinking. Also, it is important not to make the same mistake two or three times. Learn from it, evolve, and incorporate those lessons into the work. Thirdly, I would hope that leaders are not making the same mistakes as all of their neighbors. Finally, funders are not perfect either; we also make mistakes.

00:30:35-00:31:56: LIZ NGONZI: What is important to get out of this is that funders are humans. You as an organization are helping the funder meet their mission. It is a mutually beneficial relationship. It is also important to have alignment. Our next question comes from

Simi Nwogugu, CEO of Junior Achievement Africa. There is a bias towards East Africa when it comes to funders' priorities. Is that the case? What do you think might be driving that?

00:32:07-00:33:35: LISA ISSROFF: Since funders look for organizations within their networks, what tends to happen is that we all fund in the same region. Some of us fund the same organizations. There are advantages and disadvantages to that. Some regions and organizations get overlooked. There are power dynamics between funders and organizations. The assumption is that I will only fund you if you can speak English. There are many reasons why that exists.

00:33:37-00:34:34: LIZ NGONZI: What are the different ways that a funder can support an organization? Once you get the grant, that's only the beginning. You can go much further than that. Tatu, what have you experience with your funding partners? Lisa, can you share your perspective from the IFF and the Tristate Area Africa Funders Network?

00:34:36- 00:36:01: TATU GATERE: Understanding the scope of funding partners has been very important. Some funding partners are clear that they are here to support you financially and with technical assistance as well. We map those out, and we keep tabs of any changing strategies or focus areas of our funders. When we come to a critical area of need—which is usually your capacity and human resource—we reach out to partners and ask them for suggestions if our budgets cannot fit this need. Funders understand their ecosystem more than I ever could. Relying on that expertise has helped us gain the support that we need.

00:36:08-00:39:39: LISA ISSROFF: As a small family foundation, I am aware that the funds in our foundation exist in the public goods space. It is my responsibility to ensure that the funding resources are dispersed in that way. We could not do that without Buildher and the Tatus of the world. We could not exist without the partners in our portfolio. There are some funders who would upfront commit to a five-year long partnership. It is helpful to ascertain those things in advance. Tatu spoke to some of the other ways that funders or family foundations can support this work. There is a need for technical assistance. Some of the partners in our Tristate Area Africa Funders Network provide funding to organizations that source the technical assistance that they want or believe they need. Some funders also provide access to conferences, forums, or platforms where organizations can collaborate with each other. When I was visiting organizations early on, what struck me is that because this work is so hard, the leaders don't have time to visit all of their peers to learn from them. What funders can also do is provide these kinds of resources to enable leaders to learn from their peers. There are funders in our network who believe in strengthening the governance aspect of organizations. That is another way that funders can be instrumental in helping to support the organizations in their portfolios.

00:43:24-00:43:55: LIZ NGONZI: How can we communicate our hearts in the most discrete way? Communication is always affected by cultural differences. When trying to communicate in an authentic, emotive way, it is not always clear what is appropriate.

00:43:57-00:45:21: TATU GATERE: There are stages in communication that can help you in bringing out authenticity. While an intro email would be a formal one, an introductory call—where we can hear each other's voices—allows me to show my passion and authenticity. Also, I cannot bring out my passion at every stage of the process, but whenever I speak about my

reasons for starting Buildher or the nature of our work, passion has a place there. It is also helpful to share the stories of the women at Buildher. Your beneficiaries may help bring out the passion and show the work that you are doing in the community.

00:45:25-00:46:10: LISA ISSROFF: Know your funder. Tatu and I connected early on based on our passion for providing women and girls with hard skills and soft skills to empower them. Speaking on behalf of the funders in our Tristate Area Africa Funders Network, funders are also passionate, and we do this work because we care about some of these issues.

00:46:12-00:46:58: TATU GATERE: When I met Lisa, she invited me to share my passion by communicating to me what mattered to her. I took that cue and added more. Her communication invited me to open up more.

00:47:09-00:47:53: LIZ NGONZI: Given what we are experiencing now, the old model does not necessarily apply in some instances. Are funders becoming more flexible to help organization through this difficult period?

00:47:59-00:50:17: LISA ISSROFF: We need to hold other funders accountable to their values and to what they say they will do. I am a firm believer in unrestricted giving, particularly for early-stage organizations. The leader of an organization knows where they need the funds. If I trust them enough to disperse the funds, then I should trust them to know where that funding needs to go. Given the time of Covid and social justice movements, now is the time to ask ourselves very hard questions about what in our strategies and the ways we operate that perpetuate power dynamics.

00:50:30-00:51:19: LIZ NGONZI: A significant portion of funds that goes from the US to African organizations has to go through an intermediary. How can organizations that don't have a presence in the US partner with funders?

00:51:36-00:52:03: LISA ISSROFF: Many of the organizations we work with do not have a presence in the US. There are intermediaries and ways of supporting organizations other than direct funding. I would think about these things for organizations that do not have a US presence.

00:52:10-00:53:19: TATU GATERE: We work with KBFUS as well. We had many funders tell us that they want to work with us from the US, so we told our funders that we are struggling and not able to put aside resources to register in the US. Several people suggested we look into working with KBFUS. We then asked for an introduction from one of our funders.

00:53:22-00:54:11: LIZ NGONZI: What can we leave folks with as they're trying to navigate through this period of time? There are some estimates that up to 50% of organizations will go away during this period of time. This means that we need to have access to the right resources and strategies to help us move forward.

00:54:16-00:56:57: LISA ISSROFF: This work is hard. My assumption is that many leaders are overworked but fundraising and marketing will continue to be major parts of your role. It is worth taking the time and effort to think about how to be the most efficient and effective as

possible. You can't keep going to funders to say, "When you're going to give us money, then we'll be able to do something." You have to just start working. Don't let the lack of resources prevent you from going ahead. As for the funders, we must hold each other accountable. We can't keep doing the same thing as we've always been doing and expect different results. This is the moment to rethink how we relate to each other and the sector. Don't decide for a funder if they will like you or not. Just ask! Also, Buildher has a new furniture line. Those of you who are in East Africa, please check it out.

00:57:05-00:59:23: TATU GATERE: What we learned from Covid is that crisis is ground zero for opportunity. As Lisa mentioned, we launched our product line in a moment when most people would have said is not a right time. We did this in response to what our ecosystem told us. Using crisis as a time to question, explore, and communicate that exploration to your partners is important. Leaders can be overwhelmed in a moment of crisis, but you can think about how to use this time to create more opportunities, opening more conversations with your funders and networks. We cannot forget that our burden is to demonstrate our value. What we say at Buildher is that we are in the business of impact. So, we have to communicate everything we are learning—whether it's a failure or a success. We do it on our social media and our reports. This has helped turn our relationships with funders into long-term relationships because we are continuously demonstrating value. This is what we are doing at Buildher to open up new networks and support our work.

00:59:25-01:00:50: LIZ NGONZI: It is important for the funder to know that 1) you are taking an opportunity to pivot right now, and 2) you are creating a new product line that you are selling, which adds to the sustainability of your organization. You are smart about diversifying your revenue sources.

I want to thank Lisa and Tatu for a wonderful discussion. Once again, I thank the King Baudouin Foundation United States and our partners for bringing all of us together.

01:00:50-01:01:28 HAFEEZA RASHED: I hope this conversation was not only interesting but also useful to your organizations. There are several other webinars in the African Resource Mobilization Webinar Series. The next conversation will take place on March 10th on Finding Alignment: How to Attract and Engage US Corporate Partners. Thank you again for joining KBFUS.

Click [here](#) for other webinars in the African Resource Mobilization Webinar Series.

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