

European Foundations Forge Critical UN Partnerships

By John Richardson

European foundations have dramatically increased their cooperation with the United Nations in the past three years, forming a strong partnership in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In her keynote address at the 15th Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference of the European Foundation Centre (EFC), UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette welcomed the “virtual explosion” in partnerships between the United Nations and other actors, including foundations, which she recognized as having unique characteristics that lend themselves to particularly powerful collaborative action. She highlighted ways in which foundations can and do contribute:

- ◆ Provide ideas and expertise to share in solving global problems. Foundations can advance knowledge and understanding of the issues, influence debate, and contribute to decisions about the kind of research worth investing in;

- ◆ Take up roles of leadership and advocacy. Foundations are credible and respected actors in their respective countries and communities, and can use their voices to build wider support for the MDGs; and

- ◆ Work with partners on the ground on specific projects.

The United Nations also led several sessions on reaching the MDGs by 2015, creating a global movement for sport and development, and forming partnerships for world heritage conservation. The EFC Conference, entitled “Foundations for Europe: The Athens Agora—Bridging Civilisations and Cultures”, took place from 30 May to 1 June 2004 in Athens, Greece. Ms. Fréchette was delighted that the EFC International Committee has adopted a statement in support of the MDGs. The major vehicle for this work is the EFC Europe in the World (EitW) initiative, whose first full year was launched at the 2004 AGA and Conference. Its vision is to promote and create a stronger European voice in international relations and cooperation, contribute to the generation of new ideas and innovative solutions to address the root causes of poverty and despair, and give people living in these conditions hope and opportunities for a better future.

The project advocates and mobilizes more leadership, resources, collaboration and knowledge-generating efforts for global development among foundations and in partnership with Governments, multilateral and supranational institutions, businesses and international development organizations. Some ninety funders have already joined since the June 2003 launch of the pilot phase and are



UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette, with John Wyn Owen of the Nuffield Trust, Chair of the EFC International Committee, at the opening of the AGA and Conference in Athens.

forming working groups around common issues and projects. Contacts are also established with Governments, corporations, European Union institutions, the Council of Europe, the World Bank and the United Nations.

To maximize the European foundations’ impact on the MDGs, the EitW initiative is moving ahead with its core aim of persuading an ever-growing group of foundations to increase by 1 per cent annually for the next five years their expenditure for initiatives outside Europe. Some thirty EFC members already allocate more than 5 per cent of their annual expenditure worldwide, directly or through partnerships with international development organizations. Within the initiative, the EFC is beginning to monitor and track international grant-making and programme expenditure by European foundations. Preliminary results were presented at the 2004 AGA and Conference, and will be posted and updated regularly on the EitW web site (www.europeintheworld.info).

A key aspect of achieving the 5-per-cent goal is the development of the initiative’s “Matrix of Involvement”—a mechanism that enables like-minded actors to coalesce around issues described by thematic area and geography, and by acting autonomously as a group within the EitW framework to make expertise and funds available where appropriate. By facilitating and stimulating better coordination and collaboration, as well as assisting in the development of new models of engagement, the project is expected to increase the effectiveness of current actions and to unlock new resources for global development. It is within this matrix that foundations will be looking to strengthen current partnerships and identify new cooperation opportunities with the United Nations, as well as with other

This is part of a series of articles exploring the many facets of partnerships supported by the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP). In the series, some of the UN private sector and foundation partners will convey their views on how partnerships with the United Nations are being built and are achieving impact on the ground.

players working in the field of global development. In moving this forward, particular attention will be given to cross-cutting issues, such as enhancing the knowledge on foundations' strategies and contribution to development, peer-to-peer learning at programme, management and board levels, advocating for a better tax environment for international giving, and stimulating innovation.

The EFC cooperation with the United Nations took off at the 2001 AGA and Conference, where Amir Dossal of the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP), a member of the EitW Steering Committee, and Tim Wirth of the UN Foundation gave keynote speeches and experienced a three-day immersion in the world of European foundations. From that beginning, a partnership arose and included the Centre's dedication of one of its annual conferences to the theme of globalization and its consequences for citizens around the world. At the conference entitled "Foundations for Europe: The Citizen Facing Challenges of Globalisation", held from 1 to 3 June 2003 in Lisbon, Portugal, Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), spoke of the urgent need for all actors, not the least foundations, to come together to reach the MDGs. Michael Brophy of the Help for All Trust announced the launch of the pilot phase of EitW, which also marked the adoption of a statement by the EFC International Committee in support of the MDGs. With this strong base, the partnership between the United Nations and European foundations has blossomed, as illustrated by a number of cooperation initiatives:

- ❖ The EFC Orpheus Programme, which compiles a public record and public information service on foundations throughout Europe, began working with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in 2003 to map out European funding for the fight against the disease. This research, which supports the work of the EFC European HIV/AIDS Funders Group, will seek to create a comprehensive picture of the status of funding in Europe. Initial results were presented at the XV International AIDS Conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand from 11 to 16 July 2004.

- ❖ The United Nations and the EFC are working together to launch a funders network on global health and health research issues, with the World Health Organization playing a major role.

- ❖ For the past two years, the United Nations has been a member of the EFC AGA and Programme Committee, giving

John Richardson (left) is founding Chief Executive of the European Foundation Centre, an association that promotes the work of foundations and corporate funders around the world. He is also Director of the European Cultural Foundation, an honorary board member of the Carpathian Foundation, and a trustee of the Board of the Friends of Europe.

Pictured with him are Dimitris Vlastos (centre) of the Bodossaki Foundation, member of the EFC European Union Committee, and Amir Dossal, Executive Director of UNFIP.

critical input into the shaping of the content of the world's most important gathering of European independent funders.

- ❖ The EFC International Committee is developing a structured dialogue with the United Nations, and UN representatives have participated in a number of International Committee meetings and events.

- ❖ The UN Commission on the Private Sector and Development met with EFC members in November 2003 to get input from foundations on best practices and leveraging opportunities for local social and economic development, and continues to explore cooperation opportunities towards supporting private-sector development in the global south.

- ❖ A number of EFC member foundations have also worked for years with the different bodies within the UN family. A few examples of their cooperation are: making major contributions toward developing the monitoring system for the MDGs; working on the national level of a UNDP project that tracks spending on global health; working with the United Nations in Africa on HIV/AIDS and peace-building efforts in conflict zones, as well as with the UN Children's Fund on early childhood issues; and providing grants to UN bodies for various initiatives, including studying the impact of UN summits on civil society. Several Italian and Greek cultural foundations, as well as some EFC corporate members, have done much work on heritage over the years with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

A major part of the EitW mandate is to better document these kinds of partnerships. More foundation initiatives working for UN causes are outlined on its web site.

Acknowledging the contributions of foundations to the MDGs, Mr. Dossal has proposed that, together with the United Nations, they should explore how the UN system could be used as a relay, advocacy and public affairs framework, as well as a facilitator between foundations and the Governments in the countries concerned. In this regard, he encouraged the EFC to identify experiences and programmes that contribute to the MDGs. The United Nations could help showcase these initiatives throughout the UN system and provide a track to Governments and other relevant networks on the ground. □



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