New Business Models for Human Rights:
Webinar Transcript (Lightly edited for clarity)

This webinar, co-hosted by OpenGlobalRights and Rights Co-Lab, took place on May 22, 2019 and involved 57 participants. The speakers of the session were [Almut Rochowanski](#) and [Dimitrina Petrova](#).

David Petrasek: Hello everyone, welcome to this webinar on New Business Models for Human Rights. My name is David Petrasek. I'm the senior editor at Open Global Rights and I'll be moderating this discussion today with our two panelists.

Before turning to those panelists, just a few points to outline how this will run. The panelists and I will have a discussion for about 30 minutes around the topic and then we'll have about 30 minutes for questions and answers with those of you who have logged in to follow the webinar. You can post questions by going down to the Q and A tab at the bottom of your screen and just type your question in there. I would ask you just try and keep the questions short: it will be easier for us to follow them. We're livestreaming this webinar on Facebook and we're also recording it so it will be available later for those who were unable to log in today or want to go back later. The recording will be available on the website of the two co-hosts, who I'll introduce in a second.

Our topic today is New Business Models for Human Rights. Open Global Rights' online platform is co-hosting this with the Rights CoLab.

We've run a number of pieces on our website around this issue. It's driven by the sense that there's an old model of human rights work. Of course this model that I'll describe in a second never accurately described all human rights work, but there is a sense there was an old model of human rights work and its key features were the fact that the people involved tended to be professional and were accused of being members of an elite, which may or may not have been true. It was driven by advocacy, public reports and advocacy particularly through the media. Law plays an important part in the work of human rights organizations that fit this dominant model.

These are organizations that are funded largely through grants. Particularly, although not in all cases, from grants arriving from abroad, foreign funding. And these organizations had an international perspective. They relied on international standards and international law and built international networks. I want to emphasize that this model that I'm describing never

accurately described all human rights work, but it was a dominant model--and to some extent arguably remains a dominant model--at least in peoples' perception of human rights groups.

Today's discussion recognizes that times have changed. There's a widespread sense of failure over traditional advocacy techniques and public reporting. There's new pressures for groups to prove that they're local and have a local constituency, that they're not simply representative of so-called elite voices. And in the face of populist attacks and pressures in a number of countries, civil society has been facing growing restrictions on its activity. So given that background and given the model that has been dominant, today the question for us is about looking at: isn't it time to look at new models of doing this work?

Our panelists today are Dimitrina Petrova-- her full biography is online so I'll just briefly say she's the founding director of the European Roma Rights Center in Budapest. She was also the director of the Equal Rights Trust in London. She's now leading a project for the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee to consolidate human rights constituencies in Bulgaria and Macedonia. We're very happy to have you with us.

Our second panelist is Almut Rochowanski. Almut has been working with activists and their organizations in the former Soviet Union for over 15 years, particularly in the area of women's rights. Since 2012, she's been particularly focused in her research and work on searching for alternative ways to mobilize resources for these organizations. Almut, welcome, we're very pleased to have you with us today.

Okay so to get right into the subject, Dimitrina, I've described the key features of a so-called dominant model of human rights advocacy. If you agree with that very brief description that I gave, what would you see as its key weaknesses and also what strengths do they have?

Dimitrina Petrova: Thank you David. In terms of key weaknesses and key strengths, they both are related to the fact that that old model--if we can agree that there is one--reflected a different era. To me, what makes this model old is the fact that it took the global advancement of democracy and the global validity of international human rights law for granted. It was an acknowledged framework where even rogue states, even states that were dictatorships, could be held to account. So it was not just a global climate--but a global framework of legitimacy, which was taken for granted by these groups that you described as the dominant model, and they actually reflected those times. And that was their strength.

But since the times changed, what used to be the strength became now a weakness because the times are different. Now I hope that most people would agree with me that we can no longer take the global advancement of democracy for granted as we used to do after the end of the Cold War back in the 1990s, nor can we so strongly rely on the framework of international human rights law. Eroding democracy and international human rights law becomes now the fundamental limitation or growing irrelevance for this historical moment of the old model. So I think we should think about the global political environment and the models of human rights activism very much as related.

David: Can I just ask you very briefly: in the 1990s, you ran the European Roma rights center in Budapest, a well-known human rights organization working on a difficult issue in that part of the world. Did you find, at the time what you're describing, this legitimacy, this sense of

acceptance? Because you definitely found in that era your work wasn't challenged in the way it would be today. Was that a real experience for you in the 1990s?

Dimitrina: Absolutely, I'm talking from real experience. It's a different zeitgeist now. Times have changed. Back in the 1990s-- and I'm probably going into a slightly different issue--but back in the 1990s, human rights advocates like myself were sometimes referred to as let's say "traitors of national interests" and so on. But this was done by those extreme ultra-nationalist fringes of society. Today that's no longer the case. Today when human rights activists like me-- and actually everybody at least in my part of the world--are called traitors and are called to question, their work is not valued in the way it was before. Now there's a certain degree of delegitimization. The public legitimacy of human rights work is diminishing. It's not entirely gone but it's diminishing and that's very clearly related to global trends.

David: Okay turning to you Almut, are there distinguishing features of a new model for human rights work? Are there certain things that you would point to, given Dimitrina's argument that we're in new times, which would mark out the new model of human rights activism?

Almut Rochowanski: I think there's not just one new model, there's so many models, and they're not all new. Some have been with us for a very long time, since the 19th century. So there are lots and lots of models. But I think one thing that all new models--if they want to be an innovation and improvement--they have to be a lot more serious about Intersectionality. They have to be a lot more serious about "nothing about us without us." For example, when you mentioned weaknesses of the old human rights model, one of them was that it had a huge blind spot when it came to women's human rights and also other intersectional issues. And then occasionally one or another marginalized group would become fashionable, and the old model would sort of pick it up, but its format didn't work really well for them.

So the new models have to be by the same people who are actually affected by this. And that is a big challenge for us, if only because we're still the same people doing this work. We're still sitting here. We as elites, we try to reflect this in our hiring and in our internal values, but we see it's often failing. We still don't listen enough to the voices of organizers who are from the same communities who are affected and who tell us how they best protect the rights of their community or just of themselves. So I would say that the fundamental thing would be a much more "nothing about us without us."

David: So you're speaking about being more local in a sense.

Almut: Local is one thing, but let's not forget that everywhere we go there are also elites there. We have to look very closely at who is it really who's doing this work and are you really empowering those who are themselves who are affected by these conditions? And are we really listening to them and allowing them to set and drive the agenda.

David: If we can agree, Dimitrina, with Almut's point that there's a necessity to prioritize and amplify the voices of people affected, in essence going deeper and more local, I don't think anyone would argue with the importance of doing that. But is there a risk that that focus detracts from the international networking which has characterized human rights work, and which has given visible expression to that idea of international solidarity, which some would argue is at the core of human rights work. Do you see a risk there or not?

Dimitrina: I do, I see a risk there. But let me first comment on what Almut said. I think intersectionality and "nothing about us without us" and basically participation and the voice of the grassroots is not new. I think in the times which I would refer to as the "good old times" of the old model, let's say the 1990s, these things were there. They were already happening. In fact they were articulated as a need back then I think. And it's not something which distinguishes the old and the new, I believe. It's a process in which I see a continuity in that regard. In what Almut talked about, I see a continuity, not a disruption of the kind I see when we talk about the global dominance of a democratic value system, or at least the belief that this is a valid framework, in what we have now.

So at this level I see a real shift in human rights activism and therefore the need for a conversation of the new models. I'd rather see a continuity. Those issues were articulated already in the 1990s, including women, the grassroots, the voice of the weakest; and we are not there yet, because even in this conversation of empowerment, it comes from the elite that X want to empower Y. We're not in a place where the powerless rise from the bottom.

David: But her point--I paraphrase it as going deeper and local--surely that's one response to the populist attacks, which are that human rights groups following the older dominant model were out of touch and represented an elite, it's a natural response to that. So even if it was there in the 1990's, isn't it true to say now that, in these new models, there's added pressure to prove local relevance? Is that an unambiguously new thing to go back to the earlier question?

Dimitrina: It's yes and no. I would relate this to the kinds of threats human rights groups face. I see five types of threats. First and very important is the threat coming from the public. And that's the loss or the diminishing of popular legitimacy of the human rights movement, of human rights groups, and the strategy to address this is really enlarging building a constituency. And that's exactly what I have now devoted the rest of my career to doing. That's one thing.

But the second threat is the threat coming to human rights groups from governments, from authorities, from authoritarians generally, from populists, but basically from all governments. This threat is not going to be met by going local, going to the grassroots. On the contrary, if the nature of the state is changing, it's becoming in many places of the world more oppressive, then the answer should be to strike back, to recentralize, to regroup; and to actually intensify that part of the movement that is about shaming and to build new positions on things like national identity, national security and so on, to claim a civic patriotism in order to challenge the monopoly of government's and nationalism. The answer to oppression is not only to go grassroots. It's this AND…it's both going locally and going more centrally.

David: Almut, Dimitrina mentioned the threat that comes from government that's amplified of course by their repeated charge that human rights activities are foreign-funded, and you've been working for a number of years on alternative resource mobilization strategies, which I take it to include weaning organizations off foreign funding. Can you tell us briefly about the success you're achieving in your work in the former Soviet Union and give us an example of where you see that working?

Almut: Right, I want to first step back a little bit to your last question when you ask: how can prove relevance. I don't think you can prove relevance. You can have relevance or you don't

have it. If you have it, you don't need to prove it. Relevance is something you can't fake. And that goes now to answer your question.

I don't actually try to wean grassroots groups off foreign funding because in order to do that, they would have to have lots of foreign funding to begin with and they don't. For most of them, in the parts of the world that I work on--and that could be the North Caucasus in Russia or small towns in Ukraine or I've just visited Moldova where outside the capital it's much the same--they sit there for years hoping and praying and waiting for this foreign funding that's been dangled in front of them but doesn't usually come. For most, it's a reality that happens. They think that the business model will eventually work out when finally this foreign funding materializes, and they just get bits and pieces once in a while, just enough to keep them waiting and hoping.

At that point I try to step in and say, okay now let's look for something else. In a way the hope that this grant, this "white knight donor" will materialize, is what keeps them from looking at other resources. And it keeps them from seeing the resource mobilization that they already do as equally legitimate and important. They always think when they raise a little bit of money from the community that's just a temporary solution, something you should even be a little embarrassed about, and I try to tell them this is actually great what you're doing. A thousand euros you can raise in your community is much more valuable than a five-figure euro grant you can get from a foreign grantmaker.

David: If you're sitting with one of these organizations, and they're embarking on this journey to anchor their work, and you just had to give them one or two very brief words of advice, what would it be?

Almut: I wish there was a brief way to do this. I would encourage them to face the reality that they will never have enough foreign grants. If anything it's been getting less and less. This is a reality that's completely obvious to everybody and to them as well, but it's almost as if they don't want to recognize this reality. They have to keep hoping that the current lack of grants is a slump and it will go back to what they consider normal. Normal is usually a moment when for a very brief period during a humanitarian crisis or war or an intense period of reforms, a lot of grant money was available, and they created their organization anticipating this would be the "normal." I have to tell them this is not the normal.

One thing I've advised them to do--and I've had a lot of resistance--was to go to the donors and ask them questions like: "How long do you intend to be in this region? Where does your money come from? Is it even your own money? Are you going to be there for us.?" And I told them, you ask this question as part of sound financial planning, and it was really difficult for them to do it. They look with such deference at their donors. They prefer to look at them as some magical unknown entity so I tell them be realistic. Look at reality around you and see it for what it is. But also on the other hand, look at the reality around you that your community wants to support you and does it all the time, and start to see this as a serious resource.

David: In the several years you've been doing this, have you seen success with organizations?

Almut: Absolutely. Unfortunately we've seen a lot of very good beginnings that sort of fall apart or stop, and one of the reasons is that organizations get very distracted by the prospect of

grants. These are the organizations I work with. These are part of the ecosystem of civil society as a whole that created themselves on the business model of grants.

There are many entities that were created in an entirely different way and I'm not talking about them. The successes were that they know best who to ask and who to talk to. So in the North Caucasus, the people they first turned to were their former clients. That worked especially well for women's rights organizations and we thought it was understandable because, in retrospect, to me it was obvious, but at first it wasn't obvious to our local colleagues: these women's organizations were the only institution in the community that was on the women's side. Family, the community, the society, the government, were not just against them, but were violently opposed to their rights. Even if they just breathed a sign of needing help and money, their former clients were only too happy to donate and become volunteer fundraisers for them.

David: Dimitrina, you spoke earlier to push back against the government attacks on human rights activity, and I think most would agree with you. But in these new models, we've talked about funding. Some would argue there's a method of work that's new, and that's to prioritize service delivery over advocacy. Service delivery, or course, is one key way to build a local constituency. My question to you is that public advocacy has been so central to human rights groups, is it a necessary part of human rights work? And do you see a risk that in prioritizing service delivery, the advocacy component is lost, or is this a false comparison?

Dimitrina: It depends on the level or analysis: if we're talking about one human rights group, the answer is negative, no, it's not a necessary part. Each group can choose its methods of work and that can be research but not advocacy, litigation but not advocacy, service delivery but not advocacy. However, it would be a huge pity if the human rights movement taken as a whole-- let's say at the regional, national level--loses the advocacy component. I think there's something indispensable about advocacy.

It's another question whether advocacy itself should change in something. For example, whether we should try to revisit some parts of the reference framework. This is a different question. But advocacy where you're trying to convince governments and other actors to change their behavior, I think that's essential to human rights work generally. Not to each group in particular, but to human rights, to the movement taken as a whole.

David: I'm going to invite participants to post questions at this point, using the Q&A tab at the bottom of your screen, and I'll pick up your questions.

Almut, to go back to you, some would argue that the old model did not require a membership, although of course some of the classic human rights groups do have a membership, like Amnesty International. Do you see building a membership for these organizations as important? And if so, based on your experience, what advice would you give to those local organizations that intend to build a membership in order to anchor their constituency?

Almut: I think a membership never hurts. But I also think that, in order to be a truly positive beneficial factor, it has to make sense for that particular organization. So in some cases memberships work really well. On the one hand, if it allows people to buy into a set of values, to be a "card-carrying ACLU member," you become part of this community, this club of values.

But the other thing would be that you buy into a community something that all of them have a shared interest in. For example, there's a new membership-based group of car drivers in Kazakhstan. Car drivers are a very effective small-scale traffic police corruption. Now you can become a member of this entity. What this does, it's like an insurance, you get representation and legal help. But you also know that an incident, like when a cop asks you for a bribe, that organization will put it online. They film them on dashboard cameras and they put it online. They put a bumper sticker on the car--there's tens of thousands of members in this club--and police are so aware of this club, that they stopped asking for bribes from cars that have that sticker on it.

So membership works if it serves a joint interest. For example, in my country in Austria, the largest membership organization is the Austrian Alpine Club, which has been around for 150 years. About 10% of the population are members. It doesn't protect rights as such, but it protects something that people think is very essential to their country: the mountains and peoples' access to them. So when people feel there's something at stake that really affects them, then membership can be really good. It can also be good if it's an attractive value that they want to buy into.

David: Not for its own sake.

Almut: Not for its own sake. Now membership is one thing. There are other ways of having ownership. There can be different models of boards or beneficiary associations or self-help groups. Membership also kind of sounds old. It's still great, but it sounds old. In the North Caucasus, I have a partner organization that helps the families of children with disabilities, primarily to fight for benefits they are entitled to from the government: access to schools, inclusion, treatment and so on. And they have hundreds of families across the republic organized in self-help groups. It functions exactly the same as a membership card. Even more strongly, because these are effective self-help cells and groups, they're highly networked.

David: There are a lot of questions coming in from participants now. Dimitrina, you had mentioned that there were five threats but you only gave us two. A couple of our participants have asked you briefly to mention the other three threats.

Dimitrina: The first threat is from the public and it's expressed in the diminishing of legitimacy. The second threat is from the government: the closing of spaces for human rights work. The third threat is from civil society, from those parts of civil society that are not rights-based; and from the proliferation of human rights work itself, the fact that now there's any number of issues that are framed as human rights issues, and that's a problem, the dilution of the human rights movement.

The fourth threat is from funders because there is a shrinking of the available money around the world, but the constant stress on activists, the creation of a clientele, the creation of a funders' "profession," a tribe of funders that spend a lifetime being funders and almost never cross over to try to apply for funds, the success culture, the so-called monitoring and evaluation and learning.

Somebody told me the other day if you look at, for example, the British job market for civil society, let's say a charity job, the fastest growing and the largest number of positions that are

open are for monitoring and evaluation and learning and so on. Does this really mean effectiveness? No I think it doesn't.

And the fifth threat is the threat from within the human rights movement, the resistance to change. What Almut talked about, the fact that human rights veterans have difficulty when it comes to asking their own community for money. Not only in fundraising, but also in the way we think about the relationship between, let's say, service provision and other work, for-profit and nonprofit, hybridization, and many other things. This huge resistance to change that comes from within a career in human rights and from the very mindset of the human rights defender.

David: Thank you, that's very useful. There are more questions from participants coming in. Almut I'll put this one to you. One of our participants has said that maybe we're assuming there's one single model to human rights advocacy. Isn't it the case that for different types of human rights, you need different types of advocacy? For example, between civil and political and between economic and social rights. Of course your own area is women's rights and sexual violence. It seems to me that this is often stated at a kind of formalistic level but in practice, do you see the necessity for this, and have you seen it concretely in your work?

Almut: When you were earlier talking about advocacy, I was already thinking I don't use that word. I use the word "communication" because it's so much broader. So I think, for instance, just social media blogging and even messenger groups are vastly more effective, not just in reaching the community but even those in power because those in power respond to what's on social media a lot.

If there's a flash mob, that will affect a social media-driven movement like "Me Too" or "I'm not Afraid to Say" in the former Soviet Union. That reaches and touches those in power and the elites a lot more than ten fantastically well-prepared advocacy reports. In our work, we already know that we have to do all of those things.

Yes, the reports are important because with some people you need to put the facts on paper so they will even listen to you. For example--and this is not just those in power but also the mainstream media--they react to a big report more than just social media blogs. But we're talking more about raising issues with the community because oppression and denial of human rights happens on a community level. This is where we need to have these conversations. There are many different ways of having this conversation and putting this content out there and starting these discussions, using art, using culture, using social media. Very much helping people to express themselves in their own view, starting with young people, and letting young people speak for themselves and not letting people in their 50s speak for them. If you don't see that happening, you're not really looking. Can we do more of that? Of course and we're working on that every day.

David: Another question which has come in which I think might be on the minds of a number of people is: what is the role of transnational organizations that support these national or local activists in this new context, given the resources? What are local groups looking for most from transnational organizations? And I take it the questioner means not governments but transnational civil society. I'd like a response from both of you. Dimitrina, you spoke about the fifth threat coming from within the movement. Do you see particular threats that emerge there from the transnational aspect of that movement?

Dimitrina: I think everybody knows what the problems are that come from large international NGOs, their unequal relationship to local NGOs, when it comes to funding and joint projects. Yet I personally wouldn't give up on either advocacy or international human rights organizations because that, to me, would just be a surrender of the international human rights framework.

I would strongly advocate for a renewal, but I understand renewal not as abolishing what we have and building something from scratch. I think this would be a strategic mistake to the extent we still want to defend the international human rights law regime and the democratic culture that the role of the large international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, is a good thing. We shouldn't give up on that.

I could talk for hours about all the problems that such organizations create for small entities on the ground but, with all said in the end of the day, they're even more necessary today, and I don't think that that's conservative. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater altogether. We want to keep it. It's a different thing when it comes to funding these organizations who themselves have a huge problem because most international human rights organizations are increasingly challenged when it comes to funding themeslves because funders themselves have changed. These days especially, the new generation of the millennial funder, they want to go directly to the ground. They want to go directly to Zambia and work directly with an LGBT group and they don't care about some large entity that will mediate. So it's difficult for them too.

I've been the director of two such organizations and I experienced the increasing difficulty of fundraising for an international human rights NGO. But they are necessary because they can fill gaps, they build a discourse. One of my organizations built a discourse around the right to equality and models of equality law, legislation, and policies to something like over 40 countries and trained civil society on what otherwise they wouldn't themselves discover in the short term.

David: I can see that your point about the lack of funding of the transnational level is resonating with some of the participants.

Dimitrina: I think many years ago both of us were involved with one very useful international human rights organization, the International Council on Human Rights Policy based in Geneva, which did wonderful things but one day, there was no more funding.

David: Dimitrina argued the necessity of these organizations. When you think of them in your context, do you think there's something they could be doing differently?

Almut: Everybody could always do things differently. In my experience, I work really well with Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International because, at both of them, there's a small group of people who I have known very long and very well and we see eye to eye on many things, and they can be fantastic partners on a lot of things as long as we both understand that they have their own institutional priorities and ways of doing things, and I understand that grassroots groups and our partners have other interests, and if we clearly understand where we overlap and where we can support each other, and where we shouldn't expect too much from each other, then it can work fine. They are sort of a parallel track from what we're doing. We're not competing.

It largely depends on people. They have institutional constraints, some of which they created themselves and some of which they wish they didn't have but they're also facing huge challenges these days. To me fundamentally, they're an important player but they're just one of the players. I wouldn't necessarily put them in a quintessential place in all of this.

David: As we talk about these new models, are there opportunities there in terms of resource mobilization and partnership that we need to think about more so than in the past? Almut?

Almut: Again, the private sector is a very large sector. For example, we're thinking about women's rights and a lot of it is about employment. So we don't just think of the private sector as a possible source of money, but the question is whether we can have a conversation with them, about the gender pay gap, about sexual harassment in the workplace. Can we find partners there who are willing to transform their institutions, their companies, in conversation with us. That's more interesting to us.

David: But just to push the point on resource mobilization…

Almut: Look we will look for every cent wherever we can find it. And we do look very closely at which companies have an interest in doing socially responsible things. They might be interested in advertising that comes with sponsoring someone. We do approach them for resource mobilization campaigns, but frankly, just because these are huge buckets of money, doesn't mean that we should be so vastly enamored with them.

I want to specify, for example, when it was clear that grants from funders weren't going to come, or were at some point going to end, some old business model NGO leaders thought they would just go to businesses that also have large amounts of money and they would just buy ready-made projects off our hands and give us basically the equivalent of grants.

That's not going to work. Businesses have their own reasons for doing this sort of thing. And in the same way, it's harder to have a conversation with them than with just members of the public.

David: Dimitrina do you see these opportunities in your work now in Bulgaria and Macedonia?

Dimitrina: When it comes to businesses as potential sponsors of human rights work, Central and Eastern Europe is a very difficult region. I believe the business and human rights movement, corporate social responsibility, is only starting. I think we are absolutely the last in the world. To my knowledge, in my part of the world, things like Investors for Human Rights, corporations that want to assert themselves as B-Corps and so on, those are probably something that will come in the future.

But I want to make a related point. I don't think it's the right thing for human rights groups to look around at possible funding opportunities simply for the sake of it. To me what's fundamentally changed in these times and requires new models complementary to the old models--if not displacing them--is a need for human rights to look out of the box of human rights proper.

Because now the main battleground of our times is between the illiberal populists on one hand and the authoritarians on the other hand. In the past, human rights groups could afford to be concerned about human rights, period. But because now there's this existential threat of the very existence of the human rights framework itself, I think the mission of human rights groups needs to change and then, from there, the alliances, and last, the resources. I would go not from the resources to how we find that potential donor and then seek fundraising, resource mobilization, but from a new mission towards new resources.

My approach would be, now we human rights groups have what I see as a duty. We need to see ourselves as a broader pro-democracy movement and build alliances with neighboring pro-democracy movements, be it environmental, women and so on and so forth. And even where it's not forming already, to turn the tide, human rights groups could be the catalysts of such pro-democracy movements. And with that will come the diversification of the funding portfolio.

David: This building of alliances, you very eloquently put this argument about the duty of reaching out, of looking differently, of building alliances and meeting the new threat. One of our participants asked the question that we put forth at the beginning and didn't quite drill down deeply enough: What really distinguishes the new models? Maybe building alliances is one of the points.

Almut, is there something else about this new model we can point to? Earlier you mentioned this need about prioritizing the voice of the grassroots. Is there something else you would say that distinguishes this new model of human rights work that we're talking about?

Almut: It may be that the model doesn't see as a big part of its purpose the creation of free-standing long-term institutions. It may be more ad-hoc, about campaigns and flash mobs and movements that form and do their thing and then turn into something else. The traditional old model is always institution building, capacity building, asking do we have the space, do we own this office building, do we have enough staff, do we have enough certificates hanging on the wall?

I think the new model will be a bit more fluid with citizen non-professionals stepping up and taking responsibility as groups, as collectives ideally, in an intersectional way through building coalitions for a period of time and then maybe move on, maybe go into politics, maybe go back to private lives. Maybe create an organization but let's hope not always because that's basically where good ideas and organization go to die.

David: Dimitrina, do you agree with this idea of this fluidity, of the nature of the work not necessarily focused on institution-building but mobilizing in an ad-hoc and opportunistic way?

Dimitrina: Yes, however one important caveat: I think it was earlier this year I read two fascinating books both on the same topic of why some movements succeed and some fail. It's a counter-intuitive conclusion--which they make on the basis of huge empirical research over a very long period of time--that these things such as flash mobs and flexible alliances and joining groups and all this networked protest is very unsustainable. They give the examples of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Arab Spring, which failed because they lacked old-fashioned organizing with clear lines of responsibility and with everybody knowing what they're doing, with internal procedure, internal democratic decision making. Everything that

characterizes good old organizing. Those that do that, they succeed, and those who rely only on the more fashionable fluid movement not based on more solid organizing, they're very transient and ephemeral.

David: A couple more questions from participants which take us back to the funding. There's some skepticism in the questions about the actual ability to mobilize resources locally in your region or other regions and the realistic ability to do that on unpopular issues, for example LGBTQ issues. You work on women's rights and sexual violence, that may also be unpopular issues. Both of you are engaged in particular regions around questions of resource mobilization. Is this really possible? Almut, you said you've seen success, but how far can it go? What are the limits of that local fundraising model?

Almut: Every time we scratch the surface a little bit, I am surprised and inspired and blown away. Just to give you an example, and this is something I had to learn myself: do not underestimate your communities. They're a lot smarter, a lot more open-minded and civic minded and a lot more generous than you give them credit for. And every time we do this we find this is true.

For example, when I was working about a year ago with Human Rights Defenders in central Asia, we did an experiment where we brought in the actual man and woman off the street in a playful situation where they could decide who they would fund. We had local activists pitch their programs to them. One pitched the protection of a long imprisoned human rights defender in Kazakhstan. They wanted to get support for his health care and publish his books. I didn't say anything, but I thought, "you're barking up the wrong tree, they don't care about an imprisoned human rights defender." I was completely wrong. The man and woman off the street didn't just donate the play money we had given to them, but one of them donated her own money, and not a little: around $20, which is a lot of money there. This is 20% of her monthly income to this human rights defender. So every time we do this, we're surprised how open-minded and flexible people are.

Unfortunately, in my own work encouraging local groups to do this, I'm constrained because these projects are always so time-limited. In central Asia, I was able to work with them for half a day. I knew if I had been able to stay with them for a few months and keep it up, and every day ask them to spend an hour on this, we could go a lot further. But they're very busy. We have to help them to be able to do this new additional labor. Some of them would say, "now I have a hundred thousand euros a year from grants that are more or less stable, and I can never replace it;" and I would say, "of course you can't replace it immediately. I'm not saying to stop accepting grants. I'm telling you to start building that base, and over the years it will grow and you may reach a very substantial level of success. I think it's possible."

David: Dimitrina are you in agreement with Almut on this point, are you optimistic?

Dimitrina: I encourage people to read Almut's article in Open Global Rights. It paints such a super positive--I would even say a euphoric picture of this vibrant civil society in Russia that somehow manages to fund itself. I very much wish she's right.

My experience doesn't confirm that. Not that there are no such examples; yes there are. But this is a very big place, Russia and Eastern Europe, so if you're familiar with 20 or 200 examples,

we are talking about huge spaces here, many societies, so even if you put together many examples, you could still find yourself in a desert in terms of human rights activism.

Second, these donations which would come from the local community, they really are very contextual. Some issues are easier to fundraise for than others.

Third, these donations are very small. For example, in Russia in the best of times for real human rights work, this one group raised $35,000. Compared to grants that come from large foundations, that's little. My experience in Bulgaria and eastern Europe is quite sobering because I am a huge enthusiast and I tell everybody, "let's try everything, absolutely, I'm all for it." The results, however, have been a bit underwhelming. But we have to keep trying.

David: I guess that's the point, in so far as we've been talking about ways of doing things differently. In some ways, it's early days so there's a lot of ahead of us.

We've run out of time. There's a couple more questions from participants that I'm sorry I won't be able to ask, but our webinar is coming to an end.

I'd like to thank everyone involved. A virtual clap for our two panelists. Thank you very much. It's been really informative. We probably should have another discussion on these issues because there's a lot to talk about and a lot of learning to be done.

I would remind participants that there's going to be a recording of this which will be posted on the Rights CoLab and Open Global Rights websites in due course. Finally, to participants who listened in: as you log off, you'll be prompted to do a survey on what you thought about the webinar. It will only take you about 60 seconds. We hope you'll do that to help us improve how we do these webinars in the future. Thanks everyone who listened in and our panelists and Open Global Rights and Rights CoLab for hosting this webinar.