



CHIPATA ACCORD, BUILDING STRONGER CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TOGETHER



The Tilitonse Foundation (Malawi) and the Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF) are key players in national granting and community development. Both organisations hold significant regranting financial resources from Comic Relief and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (FCDO), and have over the past year developed a relationship on account of a shared "Shifting the Power programme" they are both implementing in partnership with Comic Relief and FCDO.



Tilitonse Foundation, ZGF and SGS Team Members

The two organisations came together under the guise of the Chipata Accord, a collaborative effort to strengthen their respective organisations and improve delivery to the communities they serve.

The workshop process was facilitated by SGS Consulting, drawing on shared challenges in operations, grant making, financial sustainability, and reflecting on best practices. The Chipata Accord represented a peer support mechanism to address these challenges to help build a sustainable future for the Tilitonse Foundation and ZGF, and many others operating in this space.



Shaun Samuels, Managing Director of SGS Consulting

Key achievements of the chipata accord



Knowledge exchange:

Representatives from both organisations shared common challenges and came up with best practices aimed at addressing shortcomings in areas such as HR, finance, communications, monitoring and evaluation and grant-making.



Operational and financial gaps:

The Chipata Accord tackled critical issues like addressing low staff salaries, the need for automation and improved document flows.



Sustainable model for lasting impact:

The Accord captured specific measures to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability in the respective institutions.

The "Chipata Accord" marked a significant stride toward a more sustainable future for both CSOs. The demonstrated dedication to collaboration sets a powerful example for the region, where civil society organizations (CSOs) are essential agents of positive change. Ensuring their long-term health is vital.

This newsletter underscores how collaboration strengthens CSOs, amplifying impact and resilience.

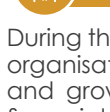
BE CHANGE MAKERS!

Barbara Nöst, CEO of ZGF emphasized the tension between our organizational aspirations and the myriad external and internal challenges we face. She urged all staff to become change makers amidst labor market pressures and funding partners' stringent rules on overhead costs and salaries, compounded by the absence of unrestricted funding and financial reserves. Additionally, she highlighted the ongoing challenge of civil society's inclination towards traditional aid systems.



Barbara Nöst, CEO of ZGF

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CHIPATA ACCORD DISCUSSIONS



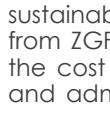
Human Resources (HR):

During the Chipata working sessions, the HR dialogue between the two organisations centered on remuneration, benefits, work environment, and growth opportunities for staff. The discussion stirred interest, as financial matters tend to captivate attention. A key question emerged: Is it feasible to offer every staff benefit when funding is limited, or should resources be reserved to sustain the organization during lean times?

Critical challenges were acknowledged, including low salaries and benefits contributing to staff demotivation and turnover. Phone talk time and fieldwork per diems were sensitive issues, with feedback indicating room for improvement.

Despite these hurdles, HR personnel demonstrated resilience and commitment to refocus, realign, and strategise to ensure the right staff for the right job. This involves sequential steps like job evaluations, implementing performance management systems, talent development, and fostering job rotation and mobility.

Staff from both organizations are keen to witness the outcomes of these efforts, and progress updates will be shared as the journey unfolds.



Finance:

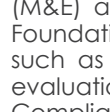
Effective financial management is crucial for operational efficiency and sustainability, as emphasised during the Chipata Accord where finance teams from ZGF and Tilitonse Foundation shared their methodologies. They highlighted the cost breakdown for grants, covering selection, implementation, evaluation, and administrative overheads, showcasing the multifaceted nature of financial management within CSOs. Beyond budgeting and expenditure tracking, the teams stressed cultivating unrestricted funds for organizational sustainability through diversifying investments, leveraging assets, and implementing robust financial reporting mechanisms.

Modernising financial operations was a recurring theme, with both organizations utilizing a mix of online and manual processes. While online platforms streamline payments and timesheets, manual processes remain vital for specific transactions. Recognising the need for automation and improved document flows, the teams proposed solutions to streamline operations and overcome challenges such as prolonged payment processing times, finance misconceptions, compliance issues, and funding constraints. Proposed solutions include automating systems, improving document flows, fostering inter-departmental collaboration, and diversifying funding streams while prioritizing unrestricted fund growth.



Communications:

The communications departments of the two organisations serve as invaluable assets, enhancing visibility, credibility, and stakeholder engagement. Strengthening relationships with donors, partners, and the public can lead to greater support for their missions. However, existing gaps in organizational communication systems and operations must be addressed, particularly misconceptions about the department's role and capabilities. This misunderstanding can lead to misaligned expectations and hinder collaboration between departments, impacting the effectiveness of communication efforts. Supporting existing communication staff through training and improved collaboration with the other departments in their respective organisations can enhance their skills and efficiency in delivering key messages. Furthermore, cross-training and knowledge-sharing initiatives can ensure a cohesive approach to communication efforts. Despite these challenges, both organizations agreed to collaborate on projects aimed at improving their profile while addressing internal needs and challenges.



Monitoring & Evaluation:

The Chipata Accord underscored the crucial roles of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Risk Management and Compliance departments at ZGF and Tilitonse Foundation, emphasizing transparency and efficacy. M&E teams outlined strategies such as biannual and annual reports, along with baseline, midline, and end-line evaluations, complemented by initiatives like post-field visit diaries for nuanced insights. Compliance departments ensure project alignment with regulatory standards, despite challenges of balancing organisational needs and diverse community languages. Rachael Mwila advocated for stakeholder-focused assessments, while Kapaya Cholwe highlighted donor challenges regarding 'Shift the Power' principles. To overcome obstacles, proposals include strengthening grants management systems and promoting collective staff responsibility for M&E. Integrating M&E with communication department aims to streamline information dissemination and feedback. In essence, the Chipata Accord discussions demonstrated a collective commitment to accountability and effectiveness in development endeavors.



Grantmaking:

The Shift the Power Programme, supported by Comic Relief and FCDO, has transformed not only the Grants departments but the entire organizations of both ZGF and Tilitonse Foundation. With over 60% of their budgets allocated to grants for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Grants departments have become vital resources. The grants process now emphasizes participatory grant-making, involving co-creation of documents and templates, self-assessment, and financial reporting tools. Autonomy has shifted to a collective and inclusive process at every stage.

Despite these adjustments, critical challenges persist, including inadequate funds to meet capacity demands and building trust with grant applicants and donors. However, it's recognised that grants teams remain invaluable, not only for their financial role but also for their potential to contribute to organisational resource mobilisation. Their task is to demonstrate accountability internally and externally and document success stories. The effectiveness of the grants machinery may ultimately determine organisational sustainability and attractiveness to funders.



Voices from the TEAM!



"A whole lot of planning and good ideas were brought out, but it is the implementation part that we need to see through. **Kapaya Cholwe**"

"The event was highly enlightening and interactive. It was rewarding to discover that we have a partner facing similar challenges, and together, we can collaborate to address the identified gaps within our systems. **Emmaculate Bitilinyu**"



MOVING FORWARD: NEXT STEPS IN STRENGTHENING OUR IMPACT



Grantmaking:

Fresh Approach:
A concept paper exploring what makes our grantmaking process unique
Participatory grantmaking
We'll delve into lessons learned from participatory grantmaking and potential areas for improvement.



Communication Strategies:

Empowering Staff: We're developing a staff training program to enhance communication skills and understanding.

Shifting the Power: We'll collaborate on a concept note for messaging around power dynamics and impactful critical thought pieces.



HR & Capacity Building:

Alignment to Values: Change management strategies are being explored to better align staff with our organizational values and culture.

Compensation & Performance: A salary review is underway to develop a standard basic package, complemented by a performance management framework.



Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E):

Participatory M&E: We're building a participatory M&E model that addresses language challenges, aligns with communications, streamlines templates, encourages context reflection, and utilizes creative feedback mechanisms.



Finance:

Cost Model:
A standard operational cost model for grants (cost per grant) is in development.

Streamlining Workflow: We're investigating solutions for an automated system (SharePoint/Sage) with clear and transparent workflows, facilitating collaboration between programs and finance.

These projects represent a significant step forward in fulfilling the goals of the Chipata Accord. We're committed to ongoing collaboration and transparency, and we'll continue to share updates on our progress.

Robert White, CEO of Tilitonse Foundation shared that much was achieved. We did self-reflections and assessments as organizations, and set good and ambitious targets. People were inspired to view matters from a strategic point of view.

A collaborative effort to monitor the Chipata Accord is underway! One staff member from each organization has been designated to track progress. The Accord's first review is scheduled for the end of May 2024. Stay tuned for upcoming newsletters that will explore the Accord in detail, with the goal of enhancing organizational efficiency and empowering staff and grantees.



Robert White, CEO of Tilitonse Foundation presenting



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