



### **Interview with Penelope Lewis**

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WBG

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[FOUNDATIONS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND THERE IS AN INCREASING UNDERSTANDING IN THE BANK THAT THEY CAN PROVIDE THE SORT OF EXPERTISE WE LACK. THE BANK SEES FOUNDATIONS AS ABLE TO ACT QUICKLY AND TO PILOT NEW IDEAS.

- PENELOPE LEWIS]

*Relations between foundations and the World Bank have not always been the happiest, but are we at the beginning of a new chapter, Caroline Hartnell asked Penelope Lewis, Head of the Global Foundations Program at the World Bank.*

#### **What is the background to the Bank's work with foundations?**

Foundations and the World Bank Group have long been engaged in working together. Relations between the two have blown hot and cold. A foundations unit was first established at the Bank in 2000, and this team helped to lay down some crucial ground work over those initial years. But I think real institutional commitment to reach out in a sustained way to the foundation community and to bring its voice into the Bank has been more recent.

The Foundations Program is now part of a recently established Global Engagement Unit. We sit with civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector. Before, we were part of Partnership and Trust Fund Operations, which is the money bit of the Bank. Historically, foundations were seen as a source of funding and not much else.

I think the move is an indication that thinking has changed. The MDGs have demonstrated what can be done if we work together. They have also highlighted the different strengths of the different players. Foundations are an important part of the development agenda and there is an increasing understanding in the Bank that they can provide the sort of expertise we lack. The Bank sees foundations as able to act quickly and to pilot new ideas. Or maybe foundations have tried out ideas successfully and the Bank sees the potential for scaling them up.

They also have a very different audience from the Bank. The main business of the Bank will always be making loans to governments, but I think it is increasingly realized that, in order to push some of the priority agendas, we need to be reaching citizens and civil society organizations more effectively, and partnering with foundations is a very effective way to do that. For example, the Bank's new Global Partnership for Social Accountability, which will provide funding directly to civil society groups working on social accountability, is partnering with the Ford Foundation and others, and drawing on their deep expertise in this area. The new president [Jim Kim] comes from that world; he understands that without partnership we're not going to get anywhere. His interest is in coming together at an operational level, on the ground. But partnership makes for a much richer ideas lab as well. The motivations behind partnerships now are much broader than just seeking out funding.

### **What's in it for foundations?**

For foundations, what makes the Bank attractive is that it has global reach and global knowledge. It is also uniquely placed to help countries translate global goals into specific country targets. I think the other big attraction of the Bank is the dialogue it has with governments and the influence over policies. By partnering with the Bank, foundations can feed into that.

### **So, under your tenure in this post, partnerships between foundations and the World Bank will be a much bigger part of the way the Bank operates.**

Partnership is firmly on the agenda. And that includes partnership with foundations. I think what I would most like is to see partnerships with foundations become properly embedded in the Bank's DNA, not just at a corporate level but at a country level – to see partnerships take off between our country offices and the regional outposts of international foundations and local foundations.

I would also like foundations to feel the Bank is more accessible and to help build a critical mass of organizations that understand why it is important to partner with the Bank, and how to go about it. We are still at the beginning of that.

### **Could you give some examples?**

One is a recent partnership with the Hewlett Foundation, which also involves the African Economic Research Consortium and the African Development Bank. The aim is to create a new set of indicators to track service delivery performance and quality in education and health. What has been critical for success is that it really was a partnership from the get-go. Hewlett is the main funder, and Hewlett played a key role in the project design and pushed for an emphasis on the use and implementation of the data, which is one of the key indicators of the success of the project. Those indicators will be standardized across a whole continent, and over time – I think they're measured every two or three years. The Bank has brought the government into the conversation and scaled up an initiative that was very small. It started in just two countries, Tanzania and Senegal, and will now grow to 15 countries.

In the old days I think the Bank used to cook up a nice project and go around with a tin cup. That is not going to work any more, if it ever did. For a partnership to be successful over the longer term, the partners all need to be around the table and devising the project from the very beginning. If that happens, it allows the comparative advantages of the partners to be used effectively.

Another good example is the Early Childhood Development Partnership with Bernard van Leer Foundation and others, forged in Kenya about ten years ago. Again, the foundations supported piloting and incubating models of service delivery and the Bank then brought it all to scale to reach large numbers of children.

### **There have also been some partnerships that didn't work so well. The Global Fund for Community Foundations is one, I think. What went wrong?**

As I said, I want to embed this programme in the DNA of the Bank. I think one of the reasons why partnerships with foundations in the past have gone wrong is because of staff turnover and different levels of commitment. There are examples, and the Global Fund is one, of partnerships that have been based on personal commitments

and the chemistry between two people. The problem is that people at the Bank move around a lot. For me, it's crucial that a change of staff doesn't lead to a diminishing commitment. For example, Ford recently contacted me about a partnership in Mexico around forest conservation. They said 'there's a new World Bank person coming in; this is a really successful programme and we're concerned that the relationship continues'. So I connected the two people, we talked about the partnership and how and why we should continue to work together, and in so doing made sure that strong collaboration continued on the ground.

I think another reason why partnerships may not always have worked is that there was no clear understanding from the beginning about what the partnership would look like. This is one of the classic must-haves of a successful partnership – openness and trust. Trust is a tricky one. I can do all the talking in the world but until there are enough examples of successful partnerships, and of the Bank really committing to partnerships with foundations, that trust will never be developed. But I think we're moving in the right direction.

### **What's the best step for foundations that want to get involved?**

The first step is some thinking on their part – about what the Bank does and what they do and what areas fit together. Part of my role is to help foundations navigate the Bank, and to see where and how they can engage with different parts of it.

As I stressed earlier, this doesn't have to be about funding; it can be about cooperation and knowledge, or about how an ongoing foundation project fits with something that the Bank's doing. A good example of that is a partnership we have with the Carnegie Corporation of New York on higher education in Africa. The partnership is basically structured around parallel funding. The Bank has a project to develop what are called African Centres of Excellence in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Carnegie have picked off a couple of areas in which they have much greater expertise than the Bank. So they are providing complementary funding for this thematic network of African universities – something that they have supported, grown and developed over years, along with other foundations. They are also taking the lead in exploring how they can involve the African diaspora – another area in which they have expertise.

So that is an example of complementary projects fitting together and creating something much stronger than if we were doing it separately. Partnerships can take numerous different forms, and part of my job is to work out what sort of partnership would have most impact. At bottom, though, all successful partnerships rely on close communication and trust and an understanding of why working together makes sense and how all the pieces fit together.