

**Mobilizing Resources for Human Rights in Latin America:  
How Funders and Grantees Can Work Together**

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Helping grantees build and expand their resource mobilization skills is essential to their long-term sustainability and to stronger social justice movements overall. In many Latin American countries, domestic resources – be they from governments, foundations or individual donors – are underexplored. At the same time, emerging rights groups are often led by those on the margins of society with limited access to funding and networks. As some international donors withdraw from Latin America, grantees’ resource mobilization skills become particularly vital.

In 2012, Mama Cash approached a peer women’s fund in Mexico, Semillas, to explore the possibility of providing trainings to a selection of grantee partners in Latin America. The goal was to help grantees acquire knowledge and develop capacities regarding resource mobilization from both institutional and individual donors as a means of expanding and stabilizing their sources of income.



Source: [Mama Cash](#)

As the first women’s fund in Latin America, Semillas has extensive experience mobilizing resources within both a national and international context from a variety of donors. Several years ago, Semillas set up a network of individual donors in Mexico to promote an alternative approach to philanthropy that is distinct from the dominant “charity” approach. After much success with this strategy, Semillas has shared its learnings and experience with other women’s funds within Mexico. With Mama Cash’s support, Semillas is now helping organizations throughout Latin America benefit from this expertise.

**Strengthening movements in Latin America through trainings**

In May 2013, six organizations from Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Paraguay and Peru visited Semillas in Mexico City for a week-long training. Priority was given to those groups who had expressed a need to improve their fundraising skills and with whom conversations about how to move to “the next level” (that is, accessing non-women’s funds donors) had begun. Building communications capacities was a second facet of the training.

During the week, participants reflected on women’s relationship to money and the current landscape of philanthropy in their region. Participants explored ways to approach and engage institutional and individual donors, as well as how to reach out to corporate donors and link human rights work to corporate social responsibility goals. Grantees were offered a full-day training to develop strategic fundraising plans and a workshop on communications strategies. Participants were challenged to reflect on their messages so as to more persuasively position their work with donors and the public.

The grantee organizations came away from the training with new strategies. Moreover, many of the grantee partners planned to replicate the workshop within their teams. To supplement the weeklong training, Semillas made itself available to all participants through Skype and email for an additional six months, allowing them to respond to questions and provide targeted mentoring and problem-solving support.

In preparation for the training, Semillas gathered baseline information about each grantee organization's current financial status – donors, budget, etc. – and worked with each organization to formulate the concrete goals for the immediate and short term they hoped to achieve through this training. Mama Cash plans to use this baseline data to evaluate the impact of the Semillas training, assessing how each grantee's fundraising capacities have changed one year on. Results will be shared broadly to build on and learn from others' experiences in building grantee fundraising capacities, as well as to analyze this particular experiment to refine Mama Cash's approach going forward.

### **Looking ahead**

The training experience has been a learning opportunity for the funders as well as for the grantees. It allowed Semillas to expand its training services and thus generate a flexible stream of income that helps reduce its dependence on larger women's funds like Mama Cash. The interaction and exchange with grantee partners also enabled Semillas staff members to broaden their knowledge of issues in other countries throughout the region.

Mama Cash, despite its limited regional expertise and budget restrictions, was able to meet the needs of grantee partners who had expressed a desire to build specific resource mobilization capacities. Mama Cash, meanwhile, learned the importance of ensuring flexibility in grantees' budgets and work plans, allowing the grantees to implement new ideas they gained during the training. Some grantees' fundraising plans, for example, revealed a need to develop internal expertise on communications. Other participants realized a need to create a specific position for fundraising or a need to "map" real opportunities to begin developing their network of local and individual donors.

The training enabled six organizations to strengthen their key messages and prospects for long-term sustainability, further advancing women's and trans rights movements in Latin America. The sessions opened up new ways of thinking about resource mobilization. This included going beyond "the usual suspects" to include new actors in philanthropy and to engage domestic funders who traditionally may not have recognized human rights activism, let alone activism led by communities on the margins. An interesting and unplanned outcome was participants' realization that regional collaboration and exchange could be used intentionally as a strategy to influence other philanthropic actors – encouraging more support for human rights activism led by women, girls, and trans people in Latin America.

### **Lessons for funders**

Mama Cash and Semillas' experience with grantee trainings highlights several opportunities for grantmakers:

- **Foster regional dialogues.** Convenings encourage lesson-sharing among human rights activists and help funders get a better sense of grantees' needs.
- **Start from a baseline.** Examining organizations' current fundraising budgets and strategies will help develop objectives for the training session and measure impact afterwards.
- **Keep your funding flexible.** Allow grantees to adapt and incorporate new lessons and best practices into their work.
- **Encourage grantees to look for emerging actors in philanthropy.** As international power and priorities shift, grantees must broaden their donor bases to include unconventional and local sources.
- **Stay connected.** Remain accessible to grantees after a training, and check in to see how they implement new strategies.

To learn more about these funders, watch [Semillas' introductory video](#) and [Mama Cash's short piece](#) featuring grantees who participated in the training.

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