Strategy for Humanity LLC

Global Alliance for Children
Review for GHR Foundation
February 2019

"We wanted [to find] how to change the way partners work together and create something bigger on the ground."

In late 2018, GHR Foundation asked Strategy for Humanity to conduct a review of the Global Alliance for Children (GAC or Alliance) initiative to survey stakeholder reflections, draw lessons learned, and collect recommendations that could inform future initiatives. Launching in 2013, the Global Alliance for Children represented an inspiring commitment to support and improve outcomes for children throughout their life cycle, especially children most at risk of harm. Inspired by a big idea, the GAC set out to create a shared vision and actionable plan that could transform current funding and programming practices to enable a better approach for children. This was to be a large-scale initiative with transformational impact on the ground. Despite early enthusiasm and high interest, the Alliance shuttered its offices in October 2018.

"It was acknowledged from the beginning that there were risks to GAC's approach for a holistic development model, and also there was great potential…Taking these risks and allowing for new spaces with value to emerge was GAC's intent."

In general, the findings from this assessment affirm the value of the GAC vision and also that operationalizing the idea proved more difficult than anticipated. There is a strong appreciation for having a well-designed collaborative that enables a whole child, life cycle approach for funding, programming, and policy. Some believe that this type of collaborative is especially needed at this time, when bilateral funding (including U.S. government funding) is increasingly restrictive or in jeopardy, millions more children are at high risk due to regional conflicts and displacement, and the space for civil society organizations continues to shrink. At the same time, there also is now more scientific data showing conclusively the negative impact of adversity on child development and a greater body of evidence demonstrating which interventions and approaches lead to healthy development and stronger outcomes for children. In addition, more multi-sector collaborations now exist, increasing attention to the important issues affecting children but also creating greater competition for resources.

The purpose of this assessment is to reflect on the successes and challenges of the GAC experience—recognizing the enormous dedication of all involved—and to draw lessons and recommendations that can help achieve greater success and sustainability in the future. This report begins with an outline of the methodology (page 2). Part one (pages 3-8) summarizes GAC's formation and progression, highlighting key decisions and their impact. Part two (pages 9-16) synthesizes key take-aways and also offers lessons and recommendations in the areas of: Funding, Governance, Country-led Approach, and Value in a Crowded Space. The list of expert stakeholders interviewed appears in Annex I (page 17); the interview protocol appears in Annex II (page 18); and background on GHR Foundation, Strategy for Humanity, and Maria Alexandra Arriaga (Alex), this report's author, and appear in Annex III (page 19).

Methodology

This assessment took place between December 2018 and February 2019. The findings are derived from two groups of sources:

(1) <u>Desk review of Global Alliance for Children documents and related materials</u>, including: summaries of the Bellagio convening and subsequent plans for creating the Alliance; GAC strategic planning and follow up reports; a variety of memorandum and evaluations summarizing progress, concerns, and recommendations; communications materials created for various audiences to highlight vision, mission, objectives, and more; and related reports and information from other sources, including USAID and various experts in the fields of care, violence, development, protection, and more as they relate to children.

(2) <u>Interviews with almost two dozen stakeholders</u>, including: former members of the Board and Secretariat, professional staff in Cambodia and Washington, partners from USAID and Save the Children ("Save"), and other experts in the field of children in adversity, child development, child protection, and violence against children. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2019.

Note that the information gathered from the interviews is not for attribution but informs the findings throughout. Exemplary quotations taken from the interviews appear in *italics* as illustrative comments, and quotations from publications and public sources also appear in *italics* and are cited in footnotes.

The list of expert stakeholders interviewed appears in Annex I and the interview protocol appears in Annex II.

Part One: Formation, Progression, Key Decision-Points and Impact

Early Inspiration

> *"Children are the cornerstone of any nation's economic, social and political development, and not enabling children to meet their full development potential places severe constraints on a nation's prospects for growth, security and well-being."*[1]

In February 2013, the Rockefeller Foundation convened senior leaders and decision makers from fifteen organizations, eleven nations, and four regions – including foundations, multilateral institutions, government foreign assistance agencies, and researchers – at its conference center in Bellagio, Italy. Participants explored their shared interest in developing a new global alliance for children in adversity, focusing holistically on the needs of the child through their life cycle.[2]

The gathering was motivated by growing scientific evidence and research linking early childhood development, appropriate family care, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse, with the development outcomes and well-being of nations. The crucial impact of early interventions in the life cycle received special attention.

Emerging from this gathering was a sense of urgency to create a concerted initiative that focused on "the total development of the whole child, and what governments and countries need to do to achieve goals for children."[3] The convening solidified interest in forming a "mechanisms and a system for sharing, learning and practice within and among countries" on what works for children.[4] A central focus was how to enhance practices and impact in the field. This vision coincided with the release of and was meant to complement the first-ever U.S. Government's Action Plan on Children in Adversity (APCA). The GAC was a chance to embark on a bold, new global initiative.

Transforming a Vision into a Plan

A primary motivation for forming the Global Alliance for Children was to utilize the science about how to support the whole child through their life cycle and leverage this knowledge to create an actionable plan that could influence and accelerate global outcomes for children throughout their life cycle (especially children most at risk of harm) and enhance approaches and practices in the field. Building on these concepts and the energy surrounding release of the APCA, the Global Alliance for Children officially launched in October 2013. Dr. Neil Boothby, who served as the Senior Coordinator for Children in Adversity at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), played a central role with key actors at GHR Foundation, Wellspring Advisors (now Wellspring Philanthropic Fund), and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation among others; together they formed the initial architecture and plans for the Global Alliance for Children. Also engaged with the GAC in various capacities early on were Maestral, Lumos, USB Optimus, World Childhood, the World Bank, and later Save the Children and UNICEF.

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[1] Memorandum: A New Global Alliance for children in Adversity, Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Conference Center Meeting, February 12-15, 2013, Meeting Summary
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid

The original GAC vision was "a world where all children reach their full potential" and was later refined to: "Our vision is a world where all children realize their full developmental potential within nurturing, protective family care." The original mission was "to promote and support integrated evidence-based solutions to improve the lives of children in adversity"[5] and was later honed to: "Our mission is to mobilize knowledge and resources at the global, national and community levels to develop and support multi-sector initiatives that deliver significant, measurable, and sustainable results for children in adversity."

The Alliance was originally formed as "a group of funders who were committed to improving the lives of children in lower and mid-income countries (LMICs)."[6] Later, the GAC redefined the Leaders Council to be 12-16 members with representatives from private foundations, government agencies, universities, corporations, and individual experts.[7] In some ways, this broader participation model resembled the leadership structure of other collaborations, such as Gavi: The Vaccine Alliance and the Global Partnership for Education. This leadership configuration was intended to facilitate more cross-sectoral approaches and to bridge otherwise siloed efforts.

Applying scientific research on brain development, attachment theory, and toxic stress, the GAC agenda focused on three critical and interwoven objectives:
- Build strong beginnings: Reduce the number of children under five who are not meeting key developmental milestones.
- Put family care first: Reduce the number of children living outside of family care.
- Protect children: Reduce the number of children who experience violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

The central actors forming this Alliance recognized that funders have their own areas of interest and commitments, which often drive work and reinforce silos. The GAC sought to improve coordination and build a critical mass of members with a balanced focus on the three core objective areas. Within this context, the Secretariat was tasked with outreach to foundations, bilateral, multilateral, and private sector funders in the areas of early child development (ECD), family care, and child protection.

The GAC sought to increase public awareness about the damaging impact adversity has on child development and demonstrate that an integrated focus on child development leads to stronger outcomes later for human development, which also contributes to the achievement of sustainable development goals. The GAC would *measure* and establish an evidence base, *coordinate* a global platform for cooperation, *demonstrate* integrated solutions to meet the three objectives, and *advocate* to increase global awareness. In terms of advocacy, the Alliance later proposed to produce a global report card to track progress in the three core areas, advocate for local laws and policies in the demonstration countries to advance the three core areas and press for adoption of the three core objectives as a global norm.[8]

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[5] Global Alliance for Children, Strategic Plan 2013 -2015
[6] World Bank, EIM Group, Wellspring, GHR Foundation, Save the Children, Maestral International, USAID and U.S. Department of Labor, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (observer), Lumos Foundation, World Childhood Foundation, UBS Optimus Foundation
[7] Meeting of the Leaders Council, Power Point Presentation, December 8, 2014
[8] Meeting of the Leaders Council, Power Point Presentation, December 8, 2014

GAC activities would be "country-led and contextually informed and driven," while also working closely with other global, regional, and national networks and agencies "to maximize the use of the evidence and help make an effective case for investing in children across a range of public and private actors at local, national, regional, and global levels."

> *"The idea was to do something much better and more efficiently on the ground, especially where we had a large presence. We saw how support to grassroots organizations could turn into something bigger through systematic collaboration with others and the collective impact possibility."*

The selection of demonstration countries would allow the GAC to test its approach, gather information about impact, attract additional funders, and scale up similar initiatives in other regions. Initially, the criteria for selecting demonstration countries included:
- Need (dire conditions, for example lowest income countries and post-conflict/reconstruction)
- Opportunity (there is political will and commitment for child development, alliance members have networks in place) and
- Readiness (strong leadership exists in the three objective areas, policy opportunity exists, concrete efforts are already underway)

A small Secretariat would provide guidance and support to Alliance members, work closely with in-country National Alliance for Children Coordinators to develop and implement action plans, and, in general, advance the mission. The initial strategic plan also envisioned enlisting:
- *Alliance Ambassadors* who were "political, moral and religious leaders, celebrities and world-recognized experts" who could provide *eminence grise* (high esteem and influence); and an
- *Alliance Scientific Advisory Committee* or a formal relationship with an academic center focused on early childhood development (ECD), child protection, and neurobiology.

By September 2014, the Alliance was developing a coherent campaign to demonstrate, at scale in selected countries, how integrated childhood investments could effectively be defined, combined, coordinated, and operationalized.[9] With limited funding, the near-term priorities were to:
- Establish at least three demonstration countries, with early progress in another three countries;
- Approach at least ten potential new Alliance members and have at least two more bilateral and three new organizations join the Alliance; and
- Establish a Family Care First Global Initiative with seed funding from USAID (proposed) and one or more additional Alliance members.

Initial Funding Challenges

Despite early interest among important potential donors and generous support of a few foundations, the anticipated large levels of funding from a variety of bilateral, multilateral, and private foundation sources did not materialize. One stakeholder indicated the Alliance had set a goal of leveraging $25 million (USD) from diverse public and private donor institutions to enable an organizational support structure, leverage grant opportunities in the field, and demonstrate the effect of investing in a holistic, whole child and life cycle approach. With more limited resources than projected, the initial funding was sufficient to establish a Secretariat and the in-country staff and office.

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[9] Memorandum, Global Alliance for Children Leaders Council Meeting, 3rd Quarter, September 8, 2014, Section on Challenges and Solutions

Many factors influenced fundraising efforts, such as leadership transitions and restructuring at large institutions, difficulties in redirecting significant resources within large foundations, and the lingering consequences of the 2008 economic downturn.

> *"The GAC was a grand idea that never got traction; a huge vision of what it could do, but it was not possible with their resource capacity."*

The timing of GAC's formation, between 2013 and 2014, also coincided with the formation of other initiatives and collaboratives that focused on children and involved some of the same foundations and actors. During this general timeframe, some of the newly launched collaboratives included, for example, the Elevate Children Funders Group, the Early Childhood Development Action Network, Changing the Way We Care, and partnerships to end violence against children. Later, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation funded a strategic collaboration between Maestral, Lumos and Catholic Relief Services to transform the experience of orphans by supporting family care and family services as a way to advance the process of deinstitutionalization. <u>The many new, excellent initiatives and collaborations represent an important development towards increasing attention, understanding, and action on behalf of children; these initiatives also represented growing competition for priority attention and funding.</u>

> *"Some GAC members started efforts that were duplicative and confusing to others. They entered competitions for a parallel initiative…Potential donors assumed the awards would go to GAC…they lost interest when they learned that wasn't the case."*

The GAC soon faced an important challenge: Without the necessary pooled resources and with limited organizational and staff capacity, the **Alliance could not fully implement the strategic plans to realize the vision.** The fundraising challenges led GAC to explore more pragmatic opportunities.

<u>Demonstration Countries</u>

While working to secure additional funds from private and public sources, the GAC turned its attention to finding efficiencies and opportunities for initial work in demonstration countries. In 2014, the Secretariat analyzed where donors were investing and in what topics and identified a few initial countries to explore including Moldova, Uganda, Rwanda, and Cambodia. This pragmatic approach for the selection of demonstration countries moved away from the original criteria and focused on opportunities. This shift in approach led to new challenges down the road.

> *"I believed in the idea: to get a critical mass of organizations, go to a country and engage government in a higher discussion about the broader needs of children, and with them on how to resource, monitor, and act."*

For Moldova, the GAC Secretariat worked with leading foundations to commission a mapping of the family care initiatives underway in Moldova. Leaders Council members arranged a site visit to Moldova to meet with government officials and leading civil society actors. They explored a collective impact approach for the GAC to undertake in Moldova and agreed that the GAC could bring added value.[10] [11]

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[10] Memorandum, Global Alliance for Children Leaders Council Meeting, 3rd Quarter, September 8, 2014, Sub-Tab 2: Moldova

[11] Lessons Learned Note – The Global Alliance for Children, Michael Gibbons, December 2018

Alliance members also conducted a site visit to Rwanda and Uganda. Ultimately, the GAC did not pursue these initiatives, each for different reasons.

The GAC members continued to pursue opportunities to mobilize interest in the central objectives. Leaders Council members hosted important convenings "to develop a collective road map to address gaps in enumeration of children outside of family care"[12] and involved international representatives from private and public sector organizations "to develop solutions to count the millions of children living outside families."[13] In addition, the newly adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goals brought added attention to related issues, prompted financial commitments from bilateral and multilateral donors, and, in turn, diminished the sense of urgency some potential members had seen in the GAC collaborative.

Opportunity for Grant Award

In March and April 2014 as part of a co-creation process under a Broad Agency Announcement, USAID invited GAC to submit a proposal to serve as the backbone for Family Care First - Cambodia (FCF). This award was part of USAID's Center for Children in Adversity to create "a global mechanism to ensure a family first approach to child care and protection, focusing on preventing avoidable child-family separation and improving the lives of children living outside family care."[14] USAID's Development Lab presented the collective impact model, which all agreed fit the FCF needs. Subsequently, USAID, as part of a co-creation process under a Broad Agency Announcement, invited proposals for an integrating partner and eventually selected Save the Children to complement GAC's backbone role in Cambodia.

> *"Each [organization] had a different vision of how the imitative would evolve and grow."[15]*

The USAID grant process and dual awards resulted in specific challenges that were critical for the two lead organizations to address and overcome (described further in Part II of this report). Important for success was to establish mutually agreed upon and distinct roles and responsibilities, clear and effective processes for consultation and coordination, and reasonable delegation of authority from Washington to field staff. According to interviews, these necessary steps did not occur and instead **lack of coordination and frequent confusion about roles and responsibilities** became a problem that fueled frustration among field staff from GAC in relation to staff from Save and USAID.

> *"For Family Care First Cambodia to succeed, there has to be a close working relationship between the backbone organization and the integrating partner. It was difficult to define roles and responsibilities and as a result some activities were being duplicated or missed."[16]*

The **award narrowed the GAC scope of work from three objectives to one**. In contrast to the original GAC vision, this award created the perception of a **U.S.- centric dynamic** since a U.S. agency was

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[12] Lessons Learned Note – The Global Alliance for Children, Michael Gibbons, December 2018.

[13] Lessons Learned Note – The Global Alliance for Children, Michael Gibbons, December 2018.

[14] Memorandum, Global Alliance for Children Leaders Council Meeting, 3rd Quarter, September 8, 2014, Section on Alliance Secretariat, 6-month Workplan

[15] Global Alliance for Children, Exit Memo, Richard Rinehart, December 2017.

[16] New Venture Fund / Global Alliance for Children, The Catalyst Project, Part of Family Care First Cambodia, Cooperative Agreement AID-OAA-A-15-00058, Quarterly Program Performance Report, Jan 1 - Mar 31, 2016, Submitted to: Robert Horvath, AOR USAID, Submitted by: New Venture Fund / GAC, May 9, 2016

providing funding and defining the scope of work in the first pilot demonstration country. In addition, having the two separate awards given to the GAC and to a large international NGO that also had a representative serving on the **GAC Leaders Council caused confusion about GAC's role and composition**, including in the community of actors in Cambodia.

> *"Was GAC a funders group or a group of NGOs with special access?"*

In early 2017, USAID led an evaluation to examine the roles and responsibilities of GAC and Save in facilitating the collective impact process and other grant requirements for Family Care First Cambodia.[17] The focus was specifically and narrowly on problematic areas and was not designed to note "the bright spots, successes, and impact." The report identified high levels of confusion among local actors about GAC's role and which organization to approach for guidance, as well as frustrations about the hurdles GAC faced to provide timely decision-making, facilitate local efficiencies, and deliver the type of support local actors needed.

Among interviewees, a recurring issue was the tension in Cambodia among key actors in the Family Care First network; in particular, strains between the expat community accustomed to leading initiatives and local Cambodian leaders. The GAC chose to have an all-Cambodian staff and prioritized having Khmer language gatherings of Cambodian with English translation; facilitated new thematic subgroups led by Cambodian professionals and conducted in Khmer; and cultivated new relationships with additional ministries in Royal Government of Cambodia, village chiefs, and local Khmer NGOs focusing on children with disabilities, parents with disabilities, and other target groups.

Following this evaluation, USAID hosted a workshop in Cambodia to engage staff from GAC, Save, and others active in Family Care First and to develop a path forward. The decision, however, by the GAC Executive Director to step down, led the GAC Leaders Council to reassess their plans. The GAC Leaders Council soon decided to transfer funds from GAC to Save the Children for the remainder of the FCF work in Cambodia and to wind down GAC operations.

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[17] The evaluation, conducted January 2017 to April 2017, was led by the Development Evaluation Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) under the US Global Development Lab's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Innovations (MERLIN) program at USAID with Social Impact, the William Davison Institute at the University of Michigan, and Search for Common Ground.

Part Two: Synthesis of Key Lessons and Recommendations

The GAC began as a bold idea to disrupt business as usual, prompt a major shift, and make a big difference for children globally.

> *"I appreciate this effort. It's hard to work on the whole child, using a developmental and multi-sectoral approach. Pioneering foundations ought to join forces to continue to have at it for this work. It's much easier for foundations to fund sectoral issues—violence against children, early child development, funding in emergencies—it's all truncated and in the end may be dooming pathways out of adversity for kids because you can't focus only on adolescents, for example, you need to begin with kids."*

After reviewing GAC materials, referencing expert publications, and interviewing key stakeholders, a few critical issues have surfaced as **key take-aways** and critical questions that are applicable to other new initiative and collaboration. In particular:

- Ensure there is a **clear purpose and specific enough scope of work**. Are the essential guidance documents in place: vision, mission, theory of change, specific objectives and goals? Are there clear roles and responsibilities, processes for partnerships, plans for co-creation and inclusive planning?

- Confirm whether there is sufficient **commitment among diverse funders** to make the initiative a priority. Are there too many competing interests that will divert or diminish the chance for success?

- At the outset, decide whether the initiative US-led and, if not, how to manage perceptions. When and how best do you engage **diverse partners**?

- Explore and **understand the implications of a whole child approach**. The concept of a "whole child, family centered, ages and stages" approach is highly complex, difficult to implement, and challenging to achieve. Before embarking on this endeavor, define clearly what this looks like, what it implies, and what clear objectives are needed for success. While recognizing that there are large sectors that are structured around education, health, child protection, children in emergencies, and more, consider potential tools for bringing together different parts of the government, funders, and actors on cross-sectoral issues, for enabling bold ideas to take shape, and for creating inclusive and strategic co-creation processes.

- Among the more difficult issues is **defining, developing and implementing a "Country-led" initiative**. Although this is a stated goal of many donors, implementing and managing a "country-led" initiative can be very challenging. Understanding local dynamics is critical, including the distinct roles for International NGOs and local organizations, the character of interactions between expat leaders and local leaders, and the country context for effective collaboration.

- Be strategic and deliberate about **Board membership** (funders, experts, NGOs?). Consider perceptions (and potential concerns about transparency or favoritism) and whether to create tiered forms of engagement (direct decision-making vs. advisory capacities). What is important to bear in mind in designing a Board and creating staff positions? Define distinct roles and responsibilities, and also determine the necessary lines of authority including delegation of some authority to the field.

The sections below focus on lessons and recommendations drawn from the GAC review and reflect the major challenges that any new initiative may face: **Funding, Governance, Country-led Approach, and Value in a Crowded Space**.

<u>Funding</u>

<u>Funding levels</u>. For the Global Alliance for Children, there were a variety of reasons (described in Part I) that the initial funding expectations did not to come to fruition including political transitions, economic climate, and competing priorities. Although many donors liked the idea, few were in a position to fund this joint endeavor at a sustainable level. Lack of sufficient funding and large-scale commitments prevented the GAC from acting on its strategy and investing to scale.

> *"Funders did not fully commit to the Alliance, except for a few."*

<u>New money needed</u>. For the initiative to work, it was important to raise large sums of new money that could be used to carry out the original strategy for advancing the three intertwined areas of work and to build the GAC organization.

> *"It's crude but money talks. To make in-country work successful, we needed to come to the table with significant money and it needed to be new money, otherwise what value did we bring? We are not the [local] experts…"*

> *"If we come with real new money, everyone is happy and we have some ability to massage the eco-system, design the funding mechanism. [You] need to have the resources behind you."*

> *"We were perceived as trying to take money away from different sectors and specific initiatives."*

<u>Siloed priorities</u>. Funders face competing priorities and often operate along the traditional siloed themes, such as early child development, child protection, violence against children, children in emergencies, and family care. A fundamental question is whether or how to prompt cross-sectoral funding, planning and collaboration. <u>How funding is structured influences the agenda</u>.

> *"Funding for children flows down sectors. There are turf silos with powerful leaders in each area and there are mighty forces that don't want it to change. This reality presented a formidable wall that blocked our ability to catalyze integrated win-win solutions for improving the wellbeing of vulnerable children and families."[18]*

> *"Money sets the framework. Congress and the way they appropriate sets [the silos] for international assistance. NGOs and UN agencies set up units to secure funding; they write proposals for siloed topics and then their units get solidified and there's more bi-fabrication."*

> *"Donors are siloed, just like NGOs and agencies. We've attempted to bring conversations together, but it's been very difficult. It's still extremely siloed."*

<u>Terms of Grant Award</u>: The USAID awarded grant presented an immediate opportunity to begin work in a desirable demonstration country: Cambodia. For the GAC, the grant introduced many new challenges.

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[18] Global Alliance for Children, Exit Memo, Rick Rinehart, December 2017

Specifically, the grant enabled work on only one of the three intertwined objectives, was specifically a U.S. government-funded initiative, and was subject to precise guidelines, requirements and bureaucratic processes that at times mis-aligned with the GAC's original plans. In retrospect, the USAID award marked a shift in the GAC's scope and focus, which eventually contributed to GAC's closure.

-   The GAC's first major demonstration initiative was to support Family Care First in Cambodia, which meant it addressed primarily just one of the Alliance's three objective areas. Instead of designing the country initiative to address the three intertwined objectives as outlined in the strategic plans, the first major initiative was narrower in scope.

-   The absence of *bilateral funding* outside of the U.S. government meant the GAC was largely perceived to be an American initiative, or at most a Global North initiative. Partners in Cambodia perceived the GAC to be a U.S. initiative. Some potential donors questioned whether they would have any ability to influence the agenda and direction of a U.S.-led initiative.

-   Since the GAC Leaders Council included funders and NGOs (including the INGO that was awarded the subsequent USAID grant to be the GAC's integrating partner in Cambodia), many actors in Cambodia perceived a conflict of interest in the award process and were confused about whether the GAC consisted of funders and/or favored NGOs, and about GAC's purpose and role.

    "The GAC [Leaders Council] consisted not only of funders but also of organizations providing direct services and seeking implementation grants. In terms of Cambodia, the USAID-funded integrating organization was also on the GAC Board, which sent a confusing message to civil society organizations in Cambodia and elsewhere: Was the Alliance a group of funders or a group of grantees with special access?"

Governance

Composition. The composition of the group is extremely important. GAC started as a funders collaborative and later expanded to include experts and NGOs. To avoid confusion and perceptions of preferential treatment, stakeholder strongly recommended that the GAC should have remained exclusively a funders' collaborative with others participating in an advisory capacity as needed.

    "A tension we had to deal with was whether the GAC was a group of funders or something else. [It was] not clear."

Expert consultations. Rather than expand GAC leadership beyond funders, a recurring recommendation from stakeholders was for experts including advocates, implementers, practitioners, researchers and others to participate in an advisory capacity and engage in regular consultations that included broad, cross-sectoral representation.

    "Having NGOs be part of the governing board was problematic. It did not seem neutral. Even if the NGO role was clean, it seemed like a conflict of interest."

Diversity. Despite best efforts, the GAC remained largely a U.S.-centric group and was perceived as such, or at most as a Global North group. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of reaching out early in the design stage to involve more diverse donors – especially from the Global South. They also underscored the importance of balancing out the U.S. government's role by ensuring strong

participation from a greater variety of private foundations, corporate foundations, international financial institutions, and public bilateral/government funding from both Global North and South.

> *"It was not balanced. The steering committee was U.S. heavy. [There was] no representation from the Global South."*

> *"There was tension. [We] had a different vision globally. If we wanted to build a global alliance, the U.S. officials-led approach…was not the most strategic for a global effort."*

Board role and communications. Clear expectations and processes need to be well-defined from the start. This includes frequency of meetings, methods for regular communication, and any expectations for fundraising, strategy development, outreach, and expertise.

> *"Coordination and collaboration are difficult and thankless tasks, but critical. Collaboration takes time and the key is trust."*

Clear purpose. There appears to have been confusion about the GAC purpose and goals. This was the case especially after accepting the award for work on Family Care First in Cambodia, which concentrated (or narrowed) the GAC focus to one of three objectives and required specific in-country roles, processes, and decision-making authority.

> *"The end goal needs to be clear; otherwise, [one] cannot lead and accomplish timebound goals."*

> *"[GAC] became a one issue initiative: family care, which is good, but not the same as the original idea."*

Staff capacity. The GAC staff members were dedicated to realizing the GAC vision, but the GAC needs evolved, were complex, and required a variety of skills to accomplish different tasks at different times. The various tasks included: guiding and supporting GAC members, fundraising capacity, communications skills to produce materials, technical expertise to manage complex grants and processes, expert knowledge to advise on programs, and management experience to empower local staff and appropriately delegate authority. GAC processes, systems, and capacity took up significant attention from the GAC Executive Director and Leaders Council.

> *"GAC could have benefited early on by hiring more staff at the DC-level. Specifically, a communications and social media expert to aggressively market the alliance and another project director to help build out its country-level portfolios and global initiatives."[19]*

Staff roles and responsibilities. A recurring theme was the need for greater clarity and accountability in staff roles and responsibilities, especially for staff in Cambodia in relation to staff Washington. Among the concerns was the issue of delegating more decision-making authority to staff overseas.

> *"Everything had to go back to Washington…The staff in country should have a decision-making role, should know that the home office and USAID will support their decision, and should be empowered to implement the ideas. This is important. The role of the home office should be to provide back stop support when it is needed. Instead, the Secretariat made most decisions."*

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[19] Global Alliance for Children, Exit Memo, Rick Rinehart, December 2017

Country-led Approach

Clear roles and an informed strategy. Prior to working in any country, it is essential to scope and understand the potential added value within the country context. This approach requires an analysis of existing consortia, partnerships, and main actors, as well as a mapping of existing donors and the gaps for moving forward a coherent agenda that can achieve clear objectives. A comprehensive landscape analysis is fundamental to inform a clear, strategic plan that "*positively fills gaps in the crowded space*" and takes into account all relevant information, promotes collective action, and provides the necessary resources.

> *"First you need a clear understanding of the context. This is one of our learnings. It is difficult to position any strategy that may be coming from outside or to know how to integrate into what is already in motion. Instead, learn what is already taking place and where the gaps are."*

Define scope and Whole Child approach. The concept of a "whole child, family centered, ages and stages" approach can be overwhelming, confusing and difficult to implement. It is important to create a co-creation process to consider and define what this looks like, what it implies, and what clear objectives are needed for success. To break down existing siloes working on diverse issues affecting children, it will be necessary to develop inclusive processes and use tools that leverage the expertise and resources of diverse actors across sectors, including leaders in government, funders, and civil society.

> *"How do we transform objectives that are bold and comprehensive into component parts to implement and track without defaulting to siloes?"*

Define "Country-led". There needs to be intentional discussion and consideration about what "country-led" looks like and means. Once defined, the strategy should be developed with some degree of flexibility to achieve several different forms of "country-led" which could include, for example: a systemic process for consultations, co-design, and decision-making that is driven by local actors; a clear landscape analysis and auditing of local actors and leaders relevant to the full scope of comprehensive objectives; a decision on whether to hire local leaders vs. expat leaders as office manager and personnel; a clear practice for collaborating with and holding accountable local government officials. It should be a "given" that meetings occur using local languages with English translation as needed.

> *"For me what I thought it was going to be was an initiative where we as funders, international partners, and local partners would agree on a national plan of action and then we would see where we fit in. We would help to set a road map and fill gaps where there is a need. We all need to take a step back and let the strategy be developed – not delivered – with strong national ownership – but that did not happen for many reasons."*

> *"Alarm bells [went off]. I could not understand it. The entire process was led by Americans and in English. It was not led by local people and did not empower them."*

> *"The government needs to be on board and [their] role needs to be clear. Donors are not active just to support the government's commitments, but also to support Civil Society Organizations that keep the government accountable."*

> *"The agents of change on the ground are or need to be Civil Society Organizations. We should think about how to empower them. In many places in the world, CSOs are under threat."*

In-country donor collaborative. Many stakeholders recommended that the funders establish or participate at a senior-level in an in-country donor committee or steering group that would bring together bilateral donors, multilateral donors, and private foundations. This would enable better coordination among funders and more consistent messaging to key government ministries, civil society organizations, and others. By improving communication and knowledge sharing, donors could enhance each other's work, prevent duplication of efforts, and reduce the potential "double funding" that might otherwise occur in support of local government or CSO priorities.

> *"A local donor collaborative that organizes convenings at the country level [can help] ensure all donors coordinate their approach."*

> *"Donors know very little about each other. A foundation data base alone would help keep track of who is doing what."*

In-country staff. The role outlined for the GAC country coordinator was large. The tasks included: working with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders; establishing a local multi-sectoral and intersectoral alliance; engaging local and external experts to identify and cost-out measurable targets for the core objectives; collaborating with the national government to develop and implement tools for a baseline, to track progress, and to support high quality studies that strengthen the evidence base; and raising public awareness. While the local staff may well have had the necessary relationship in Cambodia with peers, local NGOs, and government officials, the administration requirements for the USAID grant were complex and the dynamics between the local and expat community were strained. Although the Secretariat worked to support the Cambodia team where appropriate, problems persisted.

> *"We perceived the value of building internal capacity among our Khmer GAC team in written English language, recognizing that among the expat community in Cambodia who traditionally have led FCF and have had all the decision-making power, written English fluency is often used as a measure of professional credibility."*

Decision-making authority. Clear roles and responsibilities need to delineate, entrust, and delegate a reasonable degree of autonomous decision-making authority. Some stakeholders expressed frustration that in-country staff members were not empowered to make basic decisions. The perception is that a lack of local decision-making authority contributed to a slow pace of response, over-reliance on Washington for decisions, and contradiction of local expectations.

> *"The country coordinator did not have a clear mandate and had no decision-making authority. The coordinator could not interact locally and engage effectively because he could not be clear and responsive."*

Dynamics: Expats and local leaders. The dynamics between leaders within the expat community and Cambodian professionals were complicated and at times tense. This context contributed to the GAC local staff members, who were Cambodian, feeling side-lined and insufficiently empowered.

> *"The climate was too click-y. It did not work out well. Expats were in the top roles, Cambodians were in secondary roles – they [provided] local access but were given no real say."*

Value in a Crowded Space

The good news is that there now are more collaborative initiatives supporting early human development and specifically children and youth globally throughout the challenges they may face in their life cycle. There is more analysis about processes that facilitate collaboration, guidance to improve organizational governance, and knowledge for partnering effectively at the local level to co-create initiatives.

In recent years, the myriad issues affecting children have received greater attention on the global stage. The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals have prompted new collaborations and funding initiatives. In 2020, the 30th anniversary of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child will bring concerted attention to issues affecting children. At the same time, large movements have formed around specific objectives including early child development, violence against children, child protection, children in emergencies, deinstitutionalization, and family care. Science and research are showing the impact of adversity on early human development and the consequences later in life; and the body of knowledge about evidence-based interventions is growing. There are new funder collaboratives to leverage philanthropy and garner greater impact in a variety of fields, and more multi-lateral mechanism now exist to coordinate and concentrate bilateral assistance. A current landscape mapping could help identify gaps and opportunities.

> *"In general, the GAC is still a good idea, but I can't see space for one more global alliance."*

A key question is whether there is already or can be in the future or even should be one collaborative (of funders) that effectively takes on this task, including raising large sums of new money to be able to scale this work and influence policies, programs, and practices. It is possible that Elevate Children Funders Group is or could be such a group, but this should be explored further.

> *"There is still a need. There are so many organizations, but they work in parallel. There is no joint effort. The GAC was meant to be a neutral player, bring organizations into a joint effort, avoid duplication, leverage each other, not step on toes. It's worthwhile but needs to be very clear."*

> *"I'm proud of the decision to close. This does not happen that often. It's good to know when to close. I firmly believe it was the right decision to take, although it was hard for a lot of people."*

Looking ahead, it is important to consider carefully the role a GAC-like initiative could or should attempt.

- If the purpose is to demonstrate a co-designed, collective impact approach that encompasses all intertwined objectives for the whole child to succeed, is there access to sufficiently large, influential and consequential sums of new money to bring to the table? Is the "whole child, family centered, ages and stages" concept sufficiently defined, understood, and actionable?

> *"For this to work, [the GAC] needed funding to bring into the situation and to use funding to bring others together."*

> *"[The GAC] needed to bring large amounts of new funding that wasn't threatening to take funds from others."*

> *"The Whole Child concept is attractive, could be transformative, but also is confusing. How do you make it a reality?*

- If the purpose is to <u>fill gaps in the whole child and whole life-cycle approach</u>, should the initiative focus only on specific key objectives that currently lag behind?

    "It is a crowded space; but there are still needs, like a focus on parental care and the care reform agenda, and funding for this."

- If the purpose is to enable and <u>improve coordination, collaboration, and knowledge of each other's work</u> within a greater context of promoting the whole child, does such a mechanism currently exist?

    "Everyone saw the process from their own lens, without a collective understanding and joint planning. Instead, GAC [could be for] mapping of donors, to enable a common goal, to be flexible and integrate needs as they merge, and to be responsive to how the context is changing."

    "For real collaboration, you need to give up part of your own power to allow the collaboration to take shape. The added value could be amazing, considering what we can do separately."

Despite all the activity in recent years, it is not clear whether there is one group devoted to promoting a coherent whole child approach across the otherwise siloed issues. The GAC experience offers valuable lessons and raises important questions about how to structure a future collaborative.

Thank You

Those who envisioned the GAC and dedicated their time and resources to transform a big idea into an actionable plan deserve our deep thanks and appreciation; as do the many actors worldwide who played a direct and tangential role with the GAC. We wish to thank everyone who generously devoted time and shared insights to inform this assessment, offer lessons, and make recommendations.

We hope this report helps guide next steps to harness the wealth of experience, science, country-led expertise, and donor interests towards achieving the best outcomes for children globally.

Annex I: Stakeholder Interviewed for this Assessment

1. Britta Holmberg, GAC Leaders Council, Deputy Secretary General and Program Director at World Childhood Foundation

2. Charles Gardner, GAC Executive Director, Director of Health Science and Technology for the Foundation for a Smoke Free World

3. Cornelius Williams, GAC Leaders Council, Global Chief of Child Protection Programme, UNICEF

4. Dan Lauer, GAC Treasurer and Senior Program Officer at GHR Foundation

5. Deborah McSmith, Consultant in Cambodia

6. Gary Newton, former U.S. Government Special Advisor for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, current Senior Director for Policy at Whole Child International

7. Georgette Mulheir, GAC Vice Chair and Chief Executive Officer for Lumos

8. Ghazal Keshavarzian, Executive Director for Elevate Children Funders Group

9. Joan Lombardi, GAC Leaders Council and Bernard Van Leer Foundation

10. John Collins, USAID Education and Child Protection Team Leader, Cambodia

11. Katherine Neidorf, USAID Learning Lab: Family Care First, Cambodia

12. Kathleen Strottman, GAC Executive Director

13. Kosal Chea, GAC Country Coordinator Cambodia

14. Mattito Watson, USAID Senior Technical Advisor for Children in Adversity, formerly Senior Director for Child Protection for Save the Children

15. Neil Boothby, GAC Chair, former U.S. Government Special Adviser and Senior Coordinator for the USAID Administrator on Children in Adversity, currently Allan Rosenfield Professor and Director of the Program on Forced Migration and Health, Mailman School, Earth Institute, Columbia University

16. Philip Goldman, GAC Chair and Founder and President of Maestral International

17. Presiana Manolova, Programme Officer for Oak Foundation

18. Rick Rinehart, GAC Senior Program Officer, currently Deputy Director at The Center for Construction Research and Training

19. Sarah Gesiriech, USAID Special Advisor for Children in Adversity

20. Tom Lent, GAC Executive Director, currently Project Director for EPIC at Training Resource Group, Inc., Adjunct Professor at American University

Attempted to schedule, but unavailable: Bianca Collier, Save the Children (was Cambodia); Christian Larsson, GAC Cambodia staff; Dan Stoner, GAC Leaders Council and Save the Children (formerly); Dave Ferguson, USAID; Gillian Huebner, Consultant; Michael Gibbons, GAC Leaders Council and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund; Rob Horvath, GAC Secretariat.

Interview Content is Not for Attribution
Name:
Date:

- What is your background in this field?
- What was your role in relation to the Global Alliance for Children and when were you involved?

GAC Potential/Aspiration
- When you joined, what specifically attracted you to this initiative? What did you envision it could accomplish? Probe: What were some of the most promising potential outcomes.

Governance and Leadership
- When you were with GAC, what was the level of engagement of (board, secretariat, field lead and team)? Where did coordination work well and where did it falter?
- Who/what issues drove the agenda and activities of the GAC?

In Country Activities and Role of the Coordinator
- Much has been said about creating "country-led" initiatives that are contextual and provide flexibility to be tailored locally. Please describe what "country-led" looks like? What does this entail? What is needed for this to work well?
- For the GAC country team, what autonomy did they have? What were important opportunities and achievements? What were sources of tensions and hurdles? Did the GAC Cambodia team have the support and capacity to carry out their job? What was their role?
- What did you learn from working in Cambodia? What were main obstacles to success in country? How were local partners brought in? (language, collaboration, capacity, government obstruction, funding restrictions). How were the team and local partners selected? Was this a good process?

Partnerships and Sectors
- Is there room for a GAC initiative in a region where there are large projects underway that are led by bilateral, multi-lateral and major international NGO actors? What were the benefits/down-sides to partnerships with USAID and Save the Children?
- Is it realistic to create an initiative that combines efforts across sector areas (early childhood development, child protection, violence against children, care, and more)? What does it take/would be necessary for this to be achieved?
- Describe key players in country and their partner role. What collaborations are critical in county?

Funding
- What were key challenges to fundraising? What hindered having a more diverse donor pool?
- What were expectations among partners in country?
- Did NVF (fiscal sponsor) influence GAC operations? What was the impetus of creating a 501c3?

Going Forward
- Is there a role for a GAC-like initiative? What would be the purpose and main function? Is there a good model for building a cohesive approach that you believe is relevant to consider?

Annex III: Background
GHR Foundation, Strategy for Humanity LLC, and Author

GHR Foundation is a family foundation based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Founded in 1965 by Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst, GHR collaborates with a community of thought leaders to exchange ideas and locally-driven solutions, anchored in responsibility and the knowledge that we are all deeply connected. With our partners, we meet each challenge with creativity and optimism because we have seen the impact possible through design-build philanthropy. GHR makes grants in three areas of focus including Health, Education and Global Development.

Strategy for Humanity LLC is a woman-, minority-, and person-with-disabilities-owned firm, working with mission-driven organizations and those who fund them to develop effective strategies, conduct smart evaluations, and achieve meaningful results. We believe that *how* you conduct your work is as important as *what* you achieve, and we are proud of our track record working with public service, private sector, philanthropic, academic, and non-profit organizations.

Maria Alexandra Arriaga has served in leadership positions at the White House, the U.S. Congress, and at major non-profit organizations. She is Founder and Managing Partner at Strategy for Humanity LLC since 2009. Alex has successfully guided large and small organizations, coalitions, and collaboratives to set ambitious and achievable goals, develop and implement strategic plans, and build public education campaigns for legislative and policy victories. She is a skilled leader, facilitator, writer, and strategist and has a track record of success in local, national, and global arenas. At the local level, Alex focuses on early education and disability issues. She was recognized as an Honored Citizen for her many contributions to improve the experience for students with disabilities in the Arlington Public School district.

Alex has twice been profiled in The Washington Post, first for her leadership on human rights globally and later for her efforts for teachers supporting children with autism. She has authored and edited several publications and is on boards of organizations focused on human rights, education, refugees, and persons with disabilities. Among her recent clients are: The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, GHR Foundation, Elevate Children Funders Group, Our Secure Future, The George Washington University, Save the Children, CARE International, Amnesty International USA, and Futures Without Violence. Alex is bilingual and of Spanish and Chilean descent.