

Money as a Tool for Social Change

MAMA CASH PROMOTES FLEXIBLE FUNDING TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Protests and violent demonstrations erupted in Burundi after President Nkurunziza announced on April 25, 2015 that he plans to run for a third term, a decision deemed unconstitutional by his opposition and one that is feared to reignite ethnic hostilities. As the 2015 crisis in Burundi unfolded, Mama Cash remained in constant communication with one grantee in country to prepare for the worst-case scenario. Association des Mamans Célibataires pour la Paix et le Développement (AMC) is a civil society coalition with a very vocal and visible leader, and so it needed to brainstorm ways to continue its work while keeping security paramount in case of civil unrest and widespread violence. “As a funder, we need to figure out how we can provide funding to groups so they can use it to respond to situations quickly,” explains Mama Cash senior program officer Happy Mwendé Kinyili.



Mama Cash, an international women’s fund, started funding AMC in 2012. “We build a relationship with an organization first, and then we fund them. Mama Cash provides flexible core long-term support, meaning we fund a group, and then they alone decide how they want to spend it,” shares Happy. “It is paramount for Mama Cash that if something shifts—if a grantee sees an opportunity or faces a challenge—that our funding provide the flexibility for them to undertake whatever efforts make sense at the time.” Shifts are not always as drastic as a coup d’état, as even the day-to-day can be crisis-filled for a coalition of single mothers fighting to change social norms.

Key Info



COUNTRY
Burundi



TARGET POPULATION
Women



INTERVENTION AREA
Interpersonal training & networking

AMC was founded in 2005 by a group of students who became single mothers while attending university in the Burundian capital Bujumbura. Women who exercise sexual agency are stigmatized, and single mothers are ostracized by mainstream Burundian society. AMC struggled for integration and support from civil society movements, including prevailing women's rights organizations. This appealed to Mama Cash, which prioritizes supporting issues that are most contested and least addressed by other funders and organizations. The Amsterdam-based Mama Cash funds groups, organizations, and networks led by and working for the rights of women, girls, and trans* people.¹



AMC challenges norms and policies that discriminate against and exclude pregnant students and single mothers from their families and communities, in education, and in the labor market. In 2014, AMC attended a meeting of the provincial education board to advocate for improved policies. Happy recounts, "This left such an impression. The pervading theory in the room was that student pregnancy was tied to poverty and both knowledge about and access to reproductive health, not education policy. AMC engaged high-level policymakers to understand that forcing girls out of school only exacerbates the cycle of poverty, and contested that changing policies to be more supportive by keeping girls in school, instead of punishing them, is the only way to break that cycle." AMC also intervenes

"AMC will bring community leaders and members together to face the fact that they need to protect and promote the rights of women, including single mothers, and stop oppressive behavior." —Happy Mwende Kinyili, Mama Cash

on a case-by-case basis to allow a young pregnant girl to keep pursuing her studies. Its mobile clinic travels to secondary schools to provide young girls with information on sexual and reproductive health to help them make healthy, informed choices.

¹To respect their preference, we use the name "trans*" with an asterisk, denoting a placeholder for the "entire range of possible gender identities that fall under the broad definition of trans."

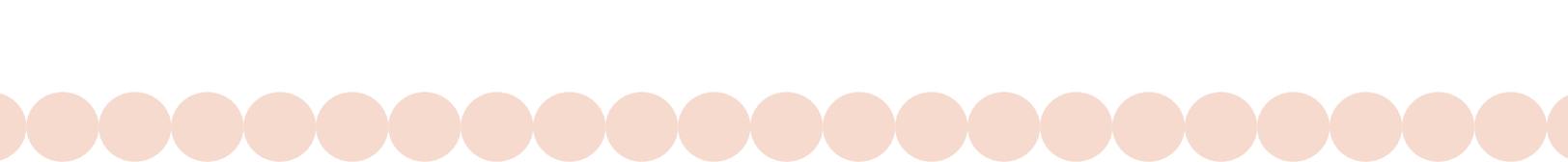
For girls kicked out of school, there are limited options for entering the labor market, and so this can lead to a life of economic oppression. AMC works to influence social norms about a single mother as a legitimate and reliable employee. For example, AMC organizes fairs where single mothers can exhibit and sell products. The fairs also become a platform to engage community leaders and members on women's rights, and how to promote and protect them.

“AMC is willing to keep pushing boundaries, to say there are ways in which society, laws, and policies don't support single mothers, and policymakers need to adapt to this reality.” —Happy Mwendu Kinyili, Mama Cash

Several women's rights organizations that were not connected with AMC initially, because of its contentious ideas and work, have since reached out to collaborate on awareness-building campaigns, including sexual and reproductive rights. AMC has seen an increase in media coverage of this issue leading to conversations across Burundian society. “It may not be a change in policy yet, but it is a conversation that was not being discussed prior to AMC's work, so change is happening. That makes us excited and shows the relevance of our work,” shares Happy. “We trust our partners, and they can leverage our funds to create social change. It's exhilarating to see our approach working.”

Funders who recognize that their funding decisions can directly drive change must also be conscious of how that power should support and complement rather than disrupt the knowledge and vision of a grantee. “It is important to remember that the ways in which we at Mama Cash understand the world, as a foundation based in the global North, are going to be different from how a group in Burundi is thinking about the work.” This has pushed the fund to reflect on how it engages groups to ensure that its grantmaking is responsive and supportive of existing movements on the ground.





Mama Cash intentionally supports grantees with more than money, through a process called accompaniment. This process involves capacity and relationship building. Mama Cash strives to connect grantees with one another and with other funders. To provide more targeted support to grantees, Mama Cash establishes advisor networks in each region where it works. Advisors provide face-to-face support, and at times capacity-building support, to grantees when Mama Cash cannot, which helps Mama Cash to stay connected and informed.

“We do get to meet our grantees, we just get creative about when and how,” explains Happy. For example, in 2014, Mama Cash attended the Asia Pacific Feminist Forum in Thailand. Mama Cash supported the attendance of several grantees to meet face-to-face, while providing them with an opportunity to network, share with, and learn from peers. “Opportunities like these are possible because of our flexible funding model.” Mama Cash is proud to see how flexible funding enables grassroots women’s organizations to tackle difficult issues, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to build women’s rights movements.

Flexible funding allows single mothers in Burundi to challenge norms and prepare for crisis.

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This case study was written by Virginia Zuco and developed for Foundation Center's Equal Footing project.

Photos were provided courtesy of Mama Cash.

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