

**EVALUATION
OF THE END
VIOLENCE
INVESTORS
FORUM
INITIATIVE**

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ABOUT

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The content of the report is the sole responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the position of Ignite Philanthropy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End to Violence against Girls and Boys (Ignite) and its partners launched the End Violence Investors Forum (Forum) in 2018 to support collaboration and learning between donors within the violence against children (VAC) sector. The Forum was sunsetted in 2023 following a learning review, a new strategy for Ignite and changes in staffing.

This evaluation was commissioned in November 2023 to explore the following questions:

1. What did the Forum achieve? How does this compare to the initial ambition? What enabled and blocked these achievements?
2. How does the Forum fit within the wider VAC space and what external factors affected it? How can similar initiatives continue to strengthen the space?
3. What learnings can be gleaned from the Forum's experiences to inform future work in this area?

It used a qualitative approach that utilised existing documentation, benchmarking of similar initiatives and key informant interviews with 16 stakeholders, including donors of the Forum, members, staff and external stakeholders.

Ambitions and Achievements

The Forum had a range of successes across the five years including new investments made in VAC on the Forum's counsel, information from the Forum being used to inform strategies and programmes and members exploring how to integrate VAC into their education programming. It also supported the production and launch of the first-ever World Bank investment case on violence against children in schools.

The evaluation also found that the culture and format of the Forum was widely appreciated by its members:

“I have to be a rapid jack of all trades, so it's a really helpful space, not just for my own learning, but I think all funders could be making sure that they're talking and talking with the experts and talking with each other.”

The Forum served to strengthen relationships between donors and encourage conversations between bi-lateral and private donors regarding how they can complement each other within the VAC space.

“We have bilateral relationships so we have these very different levers that we can pull on to create the change that we want. And so when, we can work together and understand an ecosystem together and see where we have comparative advantage.”

In addition to group activities, the Forum staff also provided advice and guidance on an individual basis to members, providing a sounding board based on their oversight of the sector:

“Having someone externally that you could bounce things with is really valuable, and someone that has an external eye and understanding of what's happening.”

Based on the evidence collected through the evaluation it appears that the Forum met its intent to be an exclusive, confidential, and trusted donor platform and to provide expertise of intersectional donor priorities and trends. The third aim of playing a translational role between donors and the field appears to have been less of a focus as while there is evidence of representatives of the field engaging with the Forum, this was not systematic or integrated.

During the course of the evaluation there was extensive discussion on the expectation that the Forum would play a role in mobilising new donors and funds as this was part of some of the grant agreements, and whether that was considered to have been achieved. Through the Human Dignity Foundation grant, the Forum staff engaged new donors, attracted new members and secured new donors within the online violence space, and were considered to have successfully achieved their ambitions. However others did not consider the Forum to have been successful in mobilising new funds to the sector:

“It became a little bit of a sporadic convenience and talking heads. I think that convening power of donors to talk about specific issues was great and a lot of the donors who participated in that got a lot out of that. And it allowed some connections, but the bottom line of the initiative was to mobilise new resources, not to just be a community of practice of donors. I think it became like a community of practice of donors.”

It is important to note that there appears to have been confusion and some disagreement about the role of the Forum itself as opposed to the role that the members were supposed to play in the mobilisation of funds.

Enabling Factors

The evaluation found that there were some enabling factors that supported the successes of the Forum:

- The Forum had involvement of key donors in its formation which appears to have provided a certain legitimacy that resulted in them attracting members that included the UK and Canadian government representatives.
- The skills, personalities and experience of the Forum staff was also cited as a key enabler, with the Senior Advisor being cited as a strong relationship-builder, while other respondents spoke of the Director of Ignite's strategic abilities.

- In terms of the wider ecosystem, it appears that the momentum of the sector following SDG 16.2, the INSPIRE strategies and the launch of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, was a strong catalyst for the launch and early successes of the Forum.

Challenging Factors

The Forum also faced a number of internal challenges:

- The key amongst these was the lack of ownership among Forum members leading to passive membership, compounded by a misalignment between the Forum's strategy and the understanding of the strategy by the Forum donors and members.
- The Forum did not have any initial explicit membership requirements for the members which resulted in more junior staff engagement and sometimes limited efforts from members.
- The Forum had challenges balancing a strategic approach with the interests of the members, as well as shifting donor priorities, over the course of the Forum.
- As the Forum was originally designed to act in alignment with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, and Ignite as an organisation had a purposefully low profile, there was a relative lack of awareness of the Forum, compounded by similarities with other organisations in the space.
- Some of the donors of the Forum had expectations of the Forum mobilising funds for the wider VAC space, however this was not part of the Forum's strategic or operational plans at any point during its lifespan. In addition to this, while the team had the technical know-how, they were not structured or staffed sufficiently for this work. There were attempts made to engage members in peer donor mobilisation, however these appear to have been unsuccessful.
- Several of the donors cited that they thought that the resources of and the expectations on the Forum were misaligned.

There were also several external challenges:

- Engaging and mobilising new donors was challenging as a result of wider donor priorities (such as Covid-19 and the Ukraine war), a lack of overarching investment and interest in VAC and the complex nature of VAC and how donors approach it.
- The Covid-19 pandemic occurred in the middle of the Forum's lifespan, meaning that in-person meetings were paused, all interactions were done online and many of the staff and members faced significant personal challenges.

What next?

The evaluation found that there was still a definitive role for an initiative like the Forum to play in the VAC space, supporting donors to collaborate and learn about emerging issues within the sector. However there were some suggestions about how the initiative could strengthen its own impact and therefore strengthen the sector.

These included focusing initially on the needs of the field to ensure the initiative is responding to the focuses of those working in the front-line.

Based on Ignite's new strategy, which includes elements around constructive disruption of the space, new ways of building power and purposeful inclusion and co-design, the experience and insight of the organisation could be utilised to challenge the existing power dynamics within the VAC grant-making space and strengthen its relationship with the field.

“My simplest thought is what are the needs of the field and then how can this structure help to fill that gap?”

One respondent suggested mapping the VAC sector and the role that all the various stakeholders play with their assets, to establish where an initiative such as the Forum could play a catalytic role in supporting the sector.

Based on the learnings from the Forum, co-design and co-creation would be very important to ensure ownership amongst membership. This is re-enforced by wider insights on donor collaboratives and benchmarking of similar initiatives. Sufficient time and space should be given to this process to ensure a range of stakeholders are consulted and the final model unites the key stakeholder in a mission and vision that they can get behind.

During this co-design process, the role of Ignite, the necessary resources to deliver, the roles and responsibilities of members and the governance structure should be established.

Wider Learnings

The evaluation also developed wider learnings that can be used by Ignite in future initiatives and by other donor collaboratives. Within the design phase, the foundation elements are key to the success of any initiative. This includes considering the motivations and power of stakeholders, reflecting on the needs of the field and co-creating with key stakeholders to ensure commitment and ownership. Ignite should also be clear on their role and the responsibilities and remit of their work.

Within the implementation phase, if the initiative is focusing on maximising fundraising opportunities, a clear piece of work is needed to map where the budgets that could be utilised sit and what the most strategic approach to accessing these funds are. In addition the initiative would need to have clear branding that sets it apart from other organisations working on similar remits.

Conclusions

As illustrated here, while the Forum achieved significant successes and met two of its three aims, it faced significant challenges. These can be built upon for future initiatives to ensure Ignite supports a strengthened VAC sector.

INTRODUCTION

Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End to Violence against Girls and Boys (Ignite) is a philanthropic fund that supports bold efforts to ensure every child lives a life free from violence. It takes advantage of philanthropy's unique role, flexibility, and ability to act quickly to empower partners and allies.

One of Ignite's flagship initiatives from 2018 through 2023 has been the End Violence Investors Forum (Forum). Initially launched in 2018, the impetus behind the Forum was from the previous President of Oak Foundation who had helped launch a private philanthropic platform aimed at addressing the global climate crisis. The Forum was originally designed to be aligned with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, strengthening and supporting their work. The model was adapted to the violence against children (VAC) prevention space through Ignite, following the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.2; the launch of the INSPIRE strategies; and the creation of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to coordinate efforts.

Among this growing momentum, the timing seemed right to launch a donor group to catalyse action to address VAC. Based upon intensive consultations with funders, the Forum was launched in February 2018 at EVAC's first "Solutions Summit." Ten public and private donors participated in this first meeting. This is considered phase one of the Forum. Approximately 10 months after its launch, however, the Forum was put on hiatus due to a lack of capacity at Ignite, until a Senior Advisor was hired in mid-2019.

At its relaunch in September 2019 (phase two), the Forum membership consisted of 12 members who remained until the Forum was discontinued: six multilateral and bilateral donors and six private foundations. At the time, two specific areas were identified as the focus of the group: addressing online child sexual abuse and exploitation (OCSE) and preventing violence in education (VACiS). For more information on how the Forum described itself and these two groups please see Annex 1.

Over the course of its lifetime, the work of the Forum was periodically financed by the Oak Foundation, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Human Dignity Foundation, and Porticus, receiving approximately \$2.86M USD in grants, from earliest conceptualisation through to phase out. During phase two the Forum had between one and three full-time staff members. Apart from the contributions from these funders, the Forum never collected member dues. The potential power behind the Forum's approach was the increased impact that the membership can achieve by collectively addressing VAC issues.

The specific objectives of the Forum's most recent theory of change were:

- 1.Enable members to make informed decisions by funding and curating essential investor related evidence and data; act as an information hub for the investor community.
- 2.Aid members in identifying opportunities to increase funding and recruit new investors to Forum-supported initiatives.
- 3.Help members align major investments, activities and new collaboration opportunities; provide understanding of the unique roles played by members; identify others to engage.
- 4.Support members to influence other donors and participants by supporting the development of a collective voice, where feasible, on key child violence issues.

This evaluation was designed to build understanding about the outcomes and learnings of the Forum between 2018 and 2023, in order to ensure that Ignite's future donor community strengthening activities would be fully aligned with the new Ignite 2024-2029 strategy. The findings will be used by Ignite Philanthropy and related initiatives to support such future iterations and activities, ensuring that work is evidence informed around what works. It will also build upon the findings of an internal learning review conducted in 2022, while the bulk of these evaluation findings are around the second phase of the Forum, from 2019 to 2023.

The evaluation was commissioned in November 2023 and was designed around a series of evaluation questions which were answered through desk reviews, primary data collection and benchmarking against similar initiatives. The primary data collection was done through key informant interviews, predominantly with staff or members of the Forum. External stakeholders were also consulted where necessary to plug gaps in understanding or insight.

The evaluation sought to respond to the following questions designed to reflect on the impact of the Forum as well as learning for the future of activities:

- 1.What did the Forum achieve? How does this compare to the initial ambition? What enabled and blocked these achievements?
- 2.How does the Forum fit within the wider VAC space and what external factors affected it? How can the similar initiatives continue to strengthen the space?
- 3.What learnings can be gleaned from the Forum' experiences to inform future work in this area?

This report details the findings and recommendations regarding the future for Ignite's related activities as well as for other similar initiatives.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation followed a mainly qualitative approach that combined existing documentation and reports with primary qualitative data gathered using key informant interviews (KIIs). This was supported by the Director of Ignite and the former M&E Manager.

Phase I: Initial Desk Review

The evaluator conducted a review of all background documents and data, including reports and strategy documentation, and related literature. The aim of the literature and data review was to: (1) familiarise with the Forum aims and objectives and relevant literature; (2) frame the evaluation; (3) inform the data collection plan and data collection tools. This phase resulted in a draft and a final inception report.

Phase II: Developing Data Collection Tools

Based on the initial desk review, final inception report and conversations with key stakeholders, an evaluation framework was developed which informed the data collection tools. This process included finalising the types of insight needed, sources of data, and any gaps in understanding. From this, a set of data collection tools was designed.

Phase III: Primary Data Gathering

Following the finalisation of the data collection tools the team reached out to identified stakeholders for KIIs within the data collection period. The interviews typically followed a semi-structured process designed to collect insights on both planned outcomes and processes, as well as gather information on unintended outcomes. The evaluation design focused predominantly on primary data collected through interviews with 16 people between November 2023 and January 2024. The majority of these were former Forum members, the donors and staff members. This was augmented by interviews with external stakeholders from similar entities. A full list of interviewees is included in Annex 2.

Phase IV: Sharing Initial Findings

Some high-level initial findings following the first phase of data collection. This took the form of a short data summary to the Director of Ignite. Based on the findings, areas of interest for additional data collection were identified.

Phase V: Data Analysis

The findings from both sets of interviews were then collated and analysed using mainly thematic analysis and findings identified. These were augmented by publicly available data as well as existing data from the Forum.

Phase VI: Report Writing

This report has been produced to share the main findings of the evaluation linked to the central research questions. The draft report was shared with key staff and stakeholders. Following feedback on a first draft, the final report was delivered and a presentation done to relevant stakeholders.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this evaluation that are important to note:

1. The Forum did not have a clear monitoring system that provided data to allow the evaluation to clearly explore how it met its objectives. However some grants had reporting requirements that collated quantitative data on the Forum's progress.
2. Due to Ignite's new strategy finalisation timeline, the evaluation was conducted over a period of two months to allow insights to be generated for the strategy process.

FINDINGS

WHAT DID THE FORUM ACHIEVE? HOW DOES THIS COMPARE TO THE INITIAL AMBITION? WHAT ENABLED AND BLOCKED THESE ACHIEVEMENTS?

This section will explore the successes of the Forum, how this looked in relation to the initial concept and proposal and what the enabling and challenging factors it faced were.

Ambitions and Achievements

The development of the Investors Forum was based on a private philanthropy group focused on climate change, which the Forum attempted to replicate with the inclusion of bi-lateral donors to focus on VAC. While the Forum initially focused on all areas of VAC, it was narrowed down based on discussions to two thematic areas, online child sexual abuse and exploitation (OCSE) and preventing violence in education (VACiS), that then split the membership into two groups of nearly equal number.

It was initially launched in 2018, at a meeting of VAC stakeholders in Stockholm, and taken forward by a group of funders who had previously asked Ignite Philanthropy to take it on and run it. Based on the experiences of the Funders Table - also an Oak Foundation initiative - which was very successful in mobilising funds, the initial overarching aim of the funders involved was to mobilise additional funds into the VAC field through existing and new donors.[1] Following an exploration phase, conducted by an external consultancy, the concept was further expanded and iterated during 2018 and early 2019.[2]

While the particular focus on funding seems to have been implicit for the funders of the Forum and some of the members, the strategic documents generated during this period do not focus on this. In 2018 the Forum's mission was:

“Convene major, international, public and private, source donors to collaborate and to align and increase funding and political action for ending violence against children, in support of the mission of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.”

Within the goals and workstream objectives, there is not explicit mention of the Forum's direct role in mobilising funds and any mentions do not place the onus on the Forum itself to generate the funds, but rather it appears to be a by-product of working with donors and increasing interest and focus on VAC. This approach was further strengthened by discussions between Ignite and the Forum's Senior Advisor following his recruitment in 2019.

There was acknowledgement during this period, that the Forum was not an appropriate vehicle for mobilising funds at the scale that appears to have been expected by some of the donors. As such, strategic documents[3] generated after this period focus on where the team identified they could play a catalytic role in creating a platform to strengthen donor capacity:

1. An exclusive, confidential, and trusted donor platform.
2. Expertise of intersectional donor priorities and trends.
3. Translational role between donors and the field.

Based on this approach, the Forum hosted a range of mainly online events on specific subjects, within the two focus areas, with guest speakers, representatives of the field, and where possible in-person meetings between members.[4] These were designed to build relationships, share knowledge and insight and support donors to be more effective. It also supported individual members with advice and guidance on their own organisations.

During this time it had 12 members who remained until the Forum was discontinued; six multilateral and bilateral donors and six private foundations.

Some of the key achievements from the Forum included:

- Members Porticus and Oak Foundation made new investments to address online child sexual abuse, in part thanks to the Forum's counsel on funding needs, and UBS Optimus decided to include online child sexual abuse prevention in its Child Protection portfolio for the first time. These investments ranged between an estimated 250k and 800k USD[5].
- Forum member Human Dignity Foundation utilised Ignite's support to strategise and execute an external donor engagement event that attracted new funders and opened new opportunities for donor cultivation.
- Members such as the World Childhood Foundation and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation utilised Forum-produced information and content to inform their strategies and programmes.
- A sub-set of members that include Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Porticus, USAID and Global Affairs Canada, developed a collective view on how to integrate VAC prevention into education.
- Forum members Global Affairs Canada and FCDO began to examine how to integrate VAC prevention internally into their education programmes.
- oIt supported the production and launch of a first-ever World Bank investment case on violence against children in schools; and,
- Safe to Learn and the Global Partnership for Education strengthened their collaboration thanks to the Forum successfully facilitating a partnership between them.

The majority of those spoken to, in one way or another, referenced the culture of the Forum as a significant positive. This culture was responsible for members feeling the Forum was a safe place where they could learn about issues, trends and opportunities within the two specialist areas the Forum focused on.[6] This appears to have been particularly true of the online violence workstream where due to the nascence of the issue as a whole, donors welcomed the opportunity to delve deeper into this with others with similar interests and the role of experts brought in by the Forum.

This safe space appears to not have just been about learning in the traditional sense, but the feeling of community within the group where they could share about what they were working on or challenges that were facing them, understand what others are working on and interrogate a subject deeper in a group setting.

“I think what was really, really well done and really good and what kept people coming back to the discussion was the fact that when Jeff[7] and colleagues made a lot of effort to keep it very factual, and to present topical things and things that interest or inform people. The meetings themselves were quite well curated and very well presented.”

Forum member

“Getting the informal understanding on kind of new investments, new initiatives and learnings, I think it was really good. We had some discussions around investing in online safety initiatives to the private sector, tech innovation, some of the things that are really tricky and quite difficult. Many of us are not experts in that so I think that was helpful, also trying to compare what for example, if we invest in private sector or tech, innovation investment, what are the key aspects to think about that was really helpful. Also the alignment, understanding who is doing what things and how we fit into that, helping us to become more strategic.”

Forum member

“I really appreciated the Forum and being part of that because it was focused enough to always feel relevant. And at the same time, it was huge issues to discuss so it wasn't too narrow. I think just having a safe, open space for funders to share, learn, discuss, ask questions, I think is really important. Because if we don't speak with each other, we will contribute to fragmentation and waste of resources.”

Forum member

“I have to be a rapid jack of all trades, so it's a really helpful space, not just for my own learning, but I think all funders could be making sure that they're talking and talking with the experts and talking with each other.”

Forum member

The Forum offered opportunities for donors who already knew each other to further strengthen those relationships and keep track of what others were doing, while offering newer donors or those outside of the typical VAC circles to build their network in the area.

It also provided an opportunity for private and public funders to come together and build understanding of their roles within the sector. One member stated that otherwise they would not have had this opportunity and the audience elsewhere, as no other group has this structure, and it enabled them to build a common cause. This appears to have been particularly strong within the online violence workstream, as it appears that it was easier to establish clear roles for the two different types of funders within this area; the private funders had the ability to respond to emerging opportunities with agility and with greater risk appetite ahead of public donors funding further down the line, or using their own leverage strengths:

“We have bilateral relationships so we have these very different levers that we can pull on to create the change that we want. And so when, we can work together and understand an ecosystem together and see where we have comparative advantage.”

Forum member

This does not appear to have worked as well within the violence in schools workstream. There were different reasons given for this, including the challenges with engaging education colleagues across all the donors, resulting in limited opportunities as well as the fact that it is a more established issue area with fewer emergent opportunities for private donors to strategically complement the work of government donors.

While there are limited examples of how the Forum directly influenced the flow of money within the VAC sector, examples were provided given of how it contributed to thinking and approaches. One was a private donor working with the Forum to approach the Swedish government to advocate for more funding into VAC and for more leadership on the issue. Another private funder discussed how they gave grants that they wouldn't otherwise have given to organisations they were introduced to by the Forum.

Some members spoke of the value of some of the internal research the Forum did among its members, namely focused on what members were doing around primary prevention. Once members were surveyed, the findings were presented back providing an overview of what the donor community was doing in this area for others, to inform their work.[8]

In addition a couple of members also spoke of the individual support provided by the Forum team, using their oversight of the sector and the funders to provide advice and guidance:

“Having someone externally that you could bounce things with is really valuable, and someone that has an external eye and understanding of what's happening.”

Forum member

The team also focused a lot of energy on bringing in other sectors that could add strategic value, including building strong relationships with education stakeholders, such as the Global Partnership on Education, and facilitating breaking down siloes within organisations, such as UNICEF and engaging with the head of education and the head of child protection. The Forum staff also provided individual support to the Safe to Learn initiative. One former member spoke of how the work of moving the education sector on these issues is a significant task and the Forum should be proud of the work it did to facilitate different groups into the same room, having conversations and making changes to approaches and investments.

From this evidence, it appears that the Forum met its intent to be an exclusive, confidential, and trusted donor platform and to provide expertise of intersectional donor priorities and trends. Without data from throughout the Forum's work however, the evaluation is reliant on the retrospective reflections of the members and staff, so the assessment is not as comprehensive as would have been desired.

With regards to the ambition to have a translational role between donors and the field, while there is evidence of representatives of the field engaging with the Forum,^[9] from documents and discussions this was not as much of a focus for the Forum. The evaluation interviewed a very small sample of representatives from the field, but from the data available, it does not appear that this was achieved in great depth.

When exploring whether the Forum achieved its initial aims, the evaluation has chosen to focus on the aims articulated by the Forum. However it is important to reflect on the role that some of the funders of the Forum thought it should and would play, mobilising additional funds.^[10] As can be seen by the evidence above, this was not a strategic focus of the work of the Forum, however it was part of some of the grant agreements with some donors. What this meant appears to have meant different things to different stakeholders.

The structure, role and approach of the Forum changed over time (as previously stated this evaluation has mainly focused on the final iteration of the Forum), so the expectations of different donors changed over time, but the aims of the Forum outlined above, have stayed largely consistent. Understanding whether the Forum fully met the expectations of each grant is outside of the realm of this evaluation, particularly as Ignite secured support for Forum as part of wider grants from different donors, however upon review of the data collected for this evaluation and the original grant agreements, it appears that the aims of each grant were largely fulfilled. For those grants where there were very specific expectations of the Forum, it appears these were met to the grant makers satisfaction. For example the Human Dignity Foundation funded the OCSE workstream between 2017-2022 and the grant had the following expected outputs and outcomes:

Indicator		Target	Realised
Output	Number of prospective donors identified and prioritised	30	100; 30
	Number of prospective donors contacted and engaged by the Forum	30	41
Outcome	The number of new OCSE-focused donors who join the Investors Forum	8	2
	Number of new OCSE donors who attribute their contributions to support provided by the Forum	8	4

However during discussions with both Forum funders and the members, the expectation that the Forum was intended to be focusing mobilising funds emerged among significant numbers of interviewees, despite it not appearing in strategic documents over the course of the Forum. The Forum staff stated they repeatedly engaged the donors and the members in these strategic discussions and kept them updated on the aims of the Forum, including the role that the members could play in mobilising funds. However as the below evaluation interview quote shows, the expectation remained throughout:

“It became a little bit of a sporadic convenience and talking heads. I think that convening power of donors to talk about specific issues was great and a lot of the donors who participated in that got a lot out of that. And it allowed some connections, but the bottom line of the initiative was to mobilise new resources, not to just be a community of practice of donors. I think it became like a community of practice of donors.”

Forum member

Enablers and Challenges

There were several internal and external factors that affected the Forum, some positively, others that created challenges. This summarises those which are considered to have played the most significant role.

-Enabling Factors

It appears, from a light mapping of the sector and the insights of the evaluation responders, that the Forum included the majority of the significant donors within the VAC space.[11] A significant number of these donors also have very strong brands and reputations in the wider philanthropic space. This, by proxy, provided the Forum with a strong basis to engage with new donors, experts and the wider sector, including other intermediary vehicles. This was further strengthened by the profile of the funders of the Forum, Oak Foundation, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Porticus and Human Dignity Foundation. Despite its relative lack of brand awareness, Ignite Philanthropy and therefore the Investors Forum, was able to secure engagement with a number of significant donors including the UK and Canadian governments through this.

In addition to the legitimacy that the members of the Forum brought, the skills, personalities and the experience of the key staff involved appears to have had significant impact. Their ability to bring people together, to build relationships with them and between them, engage people with the topics at hand and provide advice and guidance was cited frequently within the evaluation interviews.[12] The strategic approach of the Director of Ignite was also cited.

It was widely acknowledged that there was significant momentum around VAC following the introduction of the indicator 16.2 as part of the SDGs in 2015. This was followed by the publication of the INSPIRE strategies and the founding of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children in 2016. As a result there was a heavy international focus on the issue area, increased funds[13] and more attention than there had been in previous years. The Forum was able to leverage this increased focus in its early years, building on its momentum and the appetite for support from the donor community.

-Challenging Factors

There were a number of internal challenges that hindered the progress and the outcomes of the Forum. This namely appears to have been issues with understanding of the intended focus and outcomes and the delivery of it. Many of the respondents cited a lack of clarity on the strategy of the Forum, however when this was explored further it appears that there were frequent discussions about the intended strategic direction with the members. As is shown in the previous section, the Forum clearly outlined its ambitions and approach; yet despite this, the expectation remained that it would be responsible for mobilising funds.

It could not be established where this disconnect initiated, but there is some suggestion that there was very limited ownership and strategic engagement from members in the Forum and as such they tended towards passive membership and as such did not adequately engage in the strategy discussions. With regards to donors it seems like different donors of the Forum had different understanding of the clarity, with some feeling strong ownership of it, while others stated it was unclear.

There were attempts to address this through discussions regarding the Forum direction and opportunities for members to input on what they wanted from the Forum. It appears that due to the capacity restraints of the members, they appear to have fallen back on the Forum being a “place to learn” however. While this is an important element, this allowed members to continue to passively engage and shift the onus onto the Forum staff to be setting strategy and mobilising funds. No clear donor leadership for the Forum and the sector emerged during the course of the Forum’s work, with members happy to follow along with what others were doing rather than take ownership and ensure the Forum was delivering what the sector needed.[14] By the end of the Forum's lifespan, there were no donors that specifically upheld VAC as a strategic funding priority and only three effectively prioritised OCSE.

“The killer of Investors Forum, was that lack of ownership.”

Forum member

“The fundamental challenge the Investors Forum had was that the donors didn't feel any ownership of this. So the Investors Forum was pitching to them, rather than them feeling this was theirs or, something of their creation and something that they had a really strong vested interest in its success.”

Forum member

During the evaluation, some interviewees cited the examples of organisations like the Global Partnership for Education and Girls not Brides who have both been able to leverage significant funds and awareness through their ambassadors, Gordon Brown for the former and Princess Mabel of the Netherlands for the latter. It was cited that due to their profile, expertise and commitment, they are able to open up decision-maker doors and make strong cases for support. However, others suggested that this model would not work for a sector such as VAC as it does not have the pre-existing prominence and is too complex.

Regardless of whether the sector could benefit from a high-profile ambassador, this would not negate the role of existing donors in providing leadership and peer-to-peer engagement with other donors. It shows that effective fundraisers have significant profile and influence, something that the Forum staff could not claim to have, reinforcing the need for donor leadership.

The Forum had very light membership expectations (to the extent that during the evaluation it was heard that some members were not aware they were members). It did not share any terms of reference for membership that outlined expectations and accountability. As such members participated in the Forum differently based on their individual needs, interests, and organisational focus, i.e., some utilised it as a traditional learning network, while others sought to take action with other members on specific issues.

Neither the Forum nor its donors established an accountability approach around donor mobilisation for members, and many members appeared unaware that this was a potential factor in their membership.[15] If they were aware of the expectations around fund mobilisation, they assumed the staff were responsible.[16] However from 2020 onwards the Forum made repeated attempts to engage members in a donor mobilisation strategy with clear pathways to how members could get involved and support the process.

“Continuing to test the Forum’s original assumptions, such as to what extent will members take a leading role in advocating among prospective funders, will continue over the course of the first year of the grant period..... Ignite will play a role in supporting Forum members to achieve [...] outcomes, but it cannot directly deliver them.”

Ignite proposal to Oak Foundation, 2022

The Forum did not stipulate who had to attend the Forum meetings as part of the membership, leaving it to the member organisations to decide amongst themselves. This was due in part to the thinking that the Forum initially did not have the position and influence to dictate who should participate from member organisations. As such the team decided to focus on demonstrating the Forum's value and thereby create demand for more senior staff to join. In addition, the nature of VAC funding meant that the relevant staff among Forum members varied widely in terms of where they sat within their respective hierarchies[17] so in practice often the most senior person that would participate in a VAC-specific fora regularly was quite low. As a result of this lack of specification on the role that should attend, different organisations used the meetings and events for different purposes with some sending technical staff and others using it as an opportunity for development for more junior staff. Without the decision-makers the Forum’s opportunity to influence funding approaches and the wider sector was limited.

Linked to these issues, donors’ ability to engage in activities like this are very limited. They may have had the appetite for it, but, in reality, they had competing priorities for their time and attention and the Forum was often near the bottom of this list. From discussions with similar initiatives, it appears that this is an issue that faces others, and it is unlikely it will be solved by Ignite.

As VAC was often not a key issue area for these donors, individuals’ involvement in a group like the Forum will not be prioritised by their organisations and therefore the space for them to engage will be limited to what they can carve out of their own time. Without wider support for VAC this is unlikely to change.

As stated above, the Forum, based on its objectives, put together a series of events on specific topics to support donor learning, conversation and collaboration. A number of members cited that while the events and sessions were interesting, they felt that the follow up from them was not sufficient in terms of what actions could be taken. The Forum staff indicated that they did make numerous attempts to engage members in ongoing conversations focused on action. but often found that the member did not have the time or the capacity to commit to anything other than just the session. Interviewees also stated that they were sometimes confused by the direction of the Forum, in terms of its activities and therefore what it was trying to achieve.

“In terms of the sessions, they weren't part of a bigger plan to something.”

Forum member

This may have been as a result of attempting to engage members in issues that they cared about. If a member indicated an interest in an area, the Forum team would endeavour to facilitate a focus on this area. Oftentimes they found that the original member who was interested then did not engage in the session or didn't have the capacity to input into it. As a result of this responsiveness without clear reasoning, to other members, some of the activities appeared disjointed and unaligned. As this was often the donors of the Forum, the staff did not feel they could assertively challenge this dynamic, however.

This appears to have been compounded by the donor priorities and individual representative shifts during the course of the Forum. As different members found that the expectations and accountabilities within their own organisation moved, what they could commit or what they needed from the Forum changed, resulting in the Forum team facing challenges to re-align with the expectations of the members. As a result of these issues, often the Forum staff focused on individual support rather than trying to align the group, resulting in them acting more as an advisory service.

Ignite Philanthropy by design historically has had a very low public profile.[18]As a result of this, there is very little awareness of its work and the role it plays within the sector, as well as the initiatives it managed, including the Investors Forum. This was compounded by the Forum initially being aligned strategically with Global Partnership ecosystem, while being hosted by Ignite, and its similarities in names and/or mandates with the Global Partnership, Safe to Learn and Elevate Children Funders Group,[19][20]. This meant that outside of those who directly interacted with the Forum, there was limited understanding of what it was and evaluation interviewees cited a number of issues with confusion regarding why each of the initiatives existed, how they complemented each other and how they were related, both when engaging others within their organisations, but also when discussing the Forum with external stakeholders.

There was some discussion during the evaluation interviews, both with staff and donors of the Forum, that the expectations for the Forum did not match the resources provided. Both the donors who spoke of this, spoke of their own internal and organisational reflections on this, and they felt that this should have been openly discussed at the time. The Forum was also not a typical “funded project”, in that while it received funding from donors, it also required their ongoing input and engagement in order to be successful and encourage other member ownership. However due to the pressures on donors listed above, for the funders of the Forum maintaining the same level of engagement in the Forum over its tenure was challenging as priorities shifted. There may have also been some frustrations with the previously discussed misalignment between expectations and reality that resulted in some donors disengaging from the initiative and moving on to other activities they felt were more aligned to what they needed. One Forum member – who was not a Forum donor – suggested that, as the donors of the Forum had their own internal organisational accountability that they needed the Forum to meet, when they found that the Forum was focusing in different areas, this created issues for them.

In addition to the internal challenges facing the Forum, it also had to contend with external structural barrier factors. There was widespread acknowledgement that donor engagement and mobilisation is difficult in any sector and two key reasons were cited. The first was the shifts in strategies and priorities within donors that happened typically every three to five years and the second was that Covid and the Ukraine conflict has pushed donors to re-prioritise and made them more cautious about commitments due to uncertainty around the future.

Within the VAC space these challenges are particularly acute as very few donors focus on it in any form and the amount of money currently allocated is very low.[21]

“

This field is shockingly, under resourced, but the prevalence is very high.[22]”

Forum member

The VAC sector faces additional challenges in donor engagement and mobilisation; as an issue it is disparate in nature, cutting across a range of sectors, including education, health, justice, transport, requiring alignment of multiple actors. As a result of it not being a single, vertical issue area, it sits across a number of portfolios, including child protection and violence against women and girls,[23] while also needing cooperation from the inter-related sectors listed above. It was repeatedly stated during this evaluation that these sectors can be very siloed from one another, creating a complex field with limited cohesion and agreement. The Forum and its members faced ongoing challenges trying to engage with these other sectors, particularly education, both internally within member organisations, but also in bringing in more education donors and engaging with other similar organisations in the education space.[24]

Compounding the issue of the cross-sectoral nature of VAC and the siloisation of the related thematics, VAC typically happens at the household or community level and is oftentimes the result of cultural norms. As such change needs to happen at a very localised level which is challenging to affect and often takes over a generation to take effect.

One of the key final external challenges was Covid. Much of the Forum’s work was focused on building relationships with and between donors which became significantly more challenging within Covid as borders shut and Zoom interactions became the norm. Two respondents also suggested that burn out may have affected some of the Forum staff and members as they faced the shift to work from home, additional pressures and for some the requirements of home schooling. This affected the amount of progress that could be made within this time.

HOW DOES THE FORUM FIT WITHIN THE WIDER VAC SPACE AND WHAT EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTED IT? HOW CAN SIMILAR INITIATIVES CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE SPACE?

The Role of the Forum

The role of donor collaboratives within the wider philanthropic space and specific issue areas is widely acknowledged and, from the success of some among these, is a proven approach to promoting donor collaboration on certain focuses and causes.

As stated in the previous section, the Forum was developed by a small group of donors to fulfil an identified gap within the VAC space. While there was a disconnect between what the donors thought the role of the Forum should be, and the Forum's strategy, it can be seen that it filled a role for its members in bringing them together around two key areas within VAC. There were other organisations in the space that provided learning and collaboration support, but none of these were focused on VAC, allowed the depth into OSCE and VACiS that the Forum did or brought together private and bi-lateral funders.

The previous section provides feedback from the members on the value that the Forum provided, how this related to their own grant-making and thinking, as well as the role it played in supporting their work. There was widespread agreement from all those spoken to within the evaluation that there was a strong role for the Investors Forum within the wider VAC space and there remains a role for a similar initiative. As detailed, donors felt they needed a closed space in which they can share and discuss their work, particularly emerging issues happening with the online violence and violence in school spaces and the Forum was able to provide this.

The Forum was initially launched in the momentum of SDG 16.2 and the INSPIRE strategies, and it was suggested that as a result of this new attention, many of the member organisations found themselves swept up in the moment. However, as the dust settled on the SDGs and other issue areas began to dominate again, donors began to question their role in the Forum and whether it was aligned to their own strategy and work. The realities of the competing internal and external priorities facing donors outlined in the previous section began to affect the levels of engagement in the Forum. How future initiatives respond to this waning interest will be key to support the re-establishment of momentum in VAC.

The Next Iteration

During discussions and analysis on how an initiative such as the Forum could continue to add value to the space, a clear model or structure did not come out. However there are key insights into the approach that should be considered when articulating and building a further donor collaborative effort that have been identified.[25]

Based on the experience of the Elevate Children Funders Group (ECFG),[26] one evaluation interviewee proposed examining the wider ecosystem prior to the design of any future initiative.

This could be done through mapping the system based on the change that Ignite and its partners want to affect in the world, and the role that different stakeholder groups play, such as governments, private donors, support functions, NGOs, community organisations and survivor organisations. ECFG utilised a theory of change to showcase the findings of their mapping, exploring the key outcomes needed to achieve the goal and who is best suited to work on them, based on the assets of all the different stakeholder groups. Using this as a starting point for discussions, Ignite could begin a process to identify the role of donors like the Forum members and Ignite Philanthropy itself, clearly articulated in relation to other groups and factors within the system.

It is important to note at this point that a donor collaborative can only have the impact allowed by its structure and its members, so it is crucial they are aligned in values and objectives in order to be as impactful as possible. Ignite should also explore what is within their locus of control when establishing the change they would like to see in the sector to avoid being tied to larger, systemic changes that will be beholden to changing dynamics within the donor community.

In addition, one member cautioned on the challenges of having an international, global focus on VAC as a donor community, due to the significant variance in VAC at a local level. In saying this however, some issues can be seen on a more international level, such as online violence.

As Ignite launches its new strategy, it is crucial that any new initiative aligns with this to avoid mission drift of the organisation. The strategy includes a focus on constructive disruption of the space, new ways of building power and purposeful inclusion and co-design. It is therefore recommended that Ignite and its partners seek to design an initiative based initially on the insight of the field as to its needs and focuses.

“My simplest thought is what are the needs of the field and then how can this structure help to fill that gap?”

External stakeholder

As it is likely that this group would still be heavily donor-led, this shift in focus would need to be carefully managed and those involved would need to be ready to actively address the power imbalances inherent within typical donor collaboratives.[27] It is important to note that there would be a central tension to this that would need to be navigated. The Forum was a donor-first service, while a field-focused donor collaborative would move any new initiative into a new dynamic.

The navigation of changing power dynamics has been increasingly discussed in recent years, with movements like #ShiftThePower emerging to advocate for communities being in charge of their own development, as well as extensive conversations about the decolonisation of the aid sector.

“#ShiftThePower is both a call for new behaviours, mindsets and ways of working and a reminder that few interactions are ever power neutral and that often, those we seek to “help” have much more power – knowledge, skills, networks – than they are given credit for. It is the job of those institutions that are serious about real, lasting change to know when to give up their own power, stand back and help make that happen.”[28]

A 2022 report on the experiences of the climate philanthropy sector discussed how donors working in collaboration, without the systemic inclusion of field perspectives, can further exacerbate traditional donor-focused approaches:

“Instead of following their own distinct approaches to addressing the climate challenge, the most active climate funders develop common strategies and align their grant making...Far from upsetting the climate philanthropy landscape, most newcomers choose to align their strategies with those of incumbent funders, and to allocate their funds to the same, small group of well-funded initiatives and organizations.”[29]

This report suggests that this style of philanthropy has had major repercussions on the climate movement space to the detriment of other forms of organising that are more attuned to both the realities on the ground and the climate justice goal. It goes on to cite the one of the Justice Funders principles:

“[end to] the paternalistic and controlling behaviours towards grantees that are based in risk-aversion, and moving towards authentic partnership where grantees retain the right to design the solutions for their lives rather than have approaches imposed on them.”[30]

While conducting research for this evaluation, no relevant examples of initiatives like the Forum, challenging these dynamics, were found. One example however that did emerge is the Girls First Fund, aligned with the Girls Not Brides movement. The Fund brings together donors to fund community-based organisations that are working to stop child marriage. They describe themselves as a “new kind of fund”[31] and their theory of change states:

“We support our partners through funding, mentoring and capacity building, connecting, and influencing. In addition to flexible multi-year funding, we accompany grantees on their journey and connect them to existing resources and advocacy opportunities enabling them to influence policies and systems to end child marriage.”[32]

Girls First Fund Theory of Change

The experiences of the Forum and that of other donor collaboratives show that bringing a group of donors together around a shared goal is challenging, as each has their own agenda and accountabilities, which will change over time. Designing an initiative that unites its members in enough of a shared goal and shared ownership, while also remaining true to Ignite’s strategy will be challenging. The design process would need to allow the time and space to bring the various stakeholders together to co-create a shared vision, mission, strategy and plan.

Using the experience of others, as well as best practice in formulating ownership, this strategy development should be done by an independent third party. They need to be able to balance the needs of the field, with those of the donors, ensuring that the latter feel engaged and ownership of the final initiative,[33] while not losing sight of the aim of being field-focused as opposed to donor interest focused.[34]

“You can want to be completely non donor driven and still be completely donor driven almost by accident.”

External stakeholder

A 2019 report by the think tank Panorama proposed three key elements to establishing a successful donor collaborative, the first of which is a shared mission:

“In the early stages of development, successful collaboratives consider critical questions to establish the foundation for future activities, such as: Why is this particular group of donors coming together? What can this group achieve as a unit that it cannot accomplish as individuals? How will this group ensure progress towards its goals?”[35]

In the benchmarking conducted for this evaluation, all of the donor collaboratives explored, including Ariadne and The International Education Funders Group (IEFG), there was a clear focus in their literature on being member-driven and member-led. And while they are still maintained by a dedicated staff, their strategy and governance is managed by the members. [36] The IEFG also has a member commitment to support keeping members engaged and focused:

“We, members of IEFG, recognise that the more we put into the network, the more we get out of it;

We support the secretariat to learn from members’ feedback on activity and to act not only on this but on their own observations of member engagement;

We value proxies of quality over quantity engagement: i.e., signs that our philanthropy has become more strategic, effective, efficient and impactful through IEFG’s work rather than counting IEFG income or event attendance.

We will track the dynamics of the IEFG system over time, learning from the diversity and strength of ties across the network.”[37]

This strategic development process should also discuss the dynamics at play, including conducting power analysis, such as the Institute of Development Studies’ framework, the powercube,[36] to fully articulate all the issues that may affect how the initiative subsequently works. Activities such as these typically bring to the fore some unspoken and unknown realities that will significantly affect the workings of an organisation or programme and how people on the outside engage with it. This process should include discussing how to maintain some of the crucial elements of the Forum that donors have cited; a place for honest open conversations about what each of them is working on and a place where they can share with peers without being approached for financial asks, while balancing a need to be more focused on the needs of the field.

The Forum found that different members engaged to different degrees, which partially affected their buy-in to the Forum's strategy and the ability of the Forum to have impact. The future initiative would need to be clear about the impact of having individuals in the room who are not as aligned with the mission and therefore may water down the impact. It may be worth considering a core group committed to the issues, and a wider one where members can be educated on the same issues and get advice on how to support their own organisations in making more strategic grants in the area. Depending on the intended impact, this core group may need to be set at decision maker level to ensure they have the power necessary to enact changes in grant-making.

If Ignite and its partners decide to continue with a similar donor collaborative model, the resource required for Ignite to run its secretariat should be fully explored, with clear articulation how each element of its role will be delivered. For example, Climate Works, the secretariat of the Funders Table, has a significant staff, including an internal research and intelligence arm that allows it to offer a clear value proposition to its donor members, in terms of keeping them up to date on the trends, challenges and opportunities within the sector.

The Forum had strong relationships with the other donor collaboratives and partnerships in the VAC space which facilitated sharing of resources, as well as providing support for each other. However as there are a number of organisations doing similar work to that of the Investors Forum, future initiatives should be carefully aligned with these to ensure there is not replication and/or competition with others (unless intended) in order to not undermine the work of others. This will support effective use of resources as well as avoiding confusion for those engaging.

When designing the new initiative, it is hoped that the consideration of these factors would support a new collaborative to build on the learnings of the Forum, enabling the development of an approach that is even more effective and impactful, as well as supporting alignment with wider sector thinking on how philanthropy works.

WHAT LEARNINGS CAN BE GLEANED FROM THE FORUM' EXPERIENCES TO INFORM FUTURE WORK IN THIS AREA?

Based on the above findings, the evaluation has sought to summarise the key learnings that can be integrated into any future Ignite Philanthropy initiatives, but also other donor collaboratives, regardless of issue area and structure.

Design.

From the learnings and wider literature, the design phase of any initiatives is crucial to its success. A number of key foundational elements should be considered prior to the implementation of any activities in order to build common understanding and goals amongst stakeholders and to establish a clear focus.

Consider the motivations and power of stakeholders. In the initial phase of discussions with potential anchor stakeholders, it would be important to consider, internally, the motivations of each donor, how their relative power may affect the dynamics of the group and what levers they may be able to pull in order to achieve the objectives of the model. These can also be discussed with each stakeholder and as a group once the initiative is established, and additional power analysis conducted both within the initiative but also to bring deeper understanding regarding how power affects relationships with those within the field.

As the proposed new initiative's focus on the field may result in some more challenging considerations and interactions for some donors, having these conversations at the outset will allow both the donor and the initiative to reflect on how this may affect the dynamics. Ignite should encourage them to consider how much they can commit to this approach in light of their own organisation's limitations.

Reflect on the needs of the field. In order to enact change, Ignite and the donors involved need to build a strong understanding of where they sit within the VAC ecosystem and what change they are contributing to. This should be augmented with meaningful engagement with field representatives to understand their priorities and needs and how the donor community can better support them to achieve change. This would involve balancing the interests of the donor community with the needs of the field, shifting away from being donor responsive to field responsive and would need members to be committed to this approach.

Co-create the initiative with key stakeholders. In order for the model to be fully owned by the donors involved (and, if relevant, representatives of the field) it needs to be co-created with those donors who will be "responsible" for its delivery. This could be done in a number of ways, but it is important that this process allows the time and space for consultation, reflection and conversation.

Ideally this would be facilitated by an external party^[39] in order to engage all the stakeholders to build a clear vision, mission and values, strategy, objectives and implementation plan.^[40] As previously stated, this would allow the process to better balance the interests of both the field and the donors involved.

Ignite Philanthropy role. Ignite Philanthropy needs to reflect and understand their role in the sector and any potential initiative. As learnt from the Forum, a strategic and leadership role for Ignite appears to have led to feelings of passivity from donors, leaving Ignite with sole responsibility and accountability for achieving the aims of the Forum. With any future initiative, how Ignite drives this will significantly affect how the end product will manifest. This is particularly significant when thinking about Ignite's strategic ambition to develop a model that strengthens relationships with the field through a donor forum as Ignite bringing a strong initial position into an initiative that they are seeking donor leadership on will potentially affect the co-creation dynamics.

Establish clear commitments from members. Have open honest discussions with prospective members to understand what they are able to commit in terms of time, responsibilities and potentially resource. This should include who from within the organisation will be attending meetings.

Start small. Based on the learnings of the Investors Forum, starting small with a select set of short-term objectives would allow the model to build momentum and engagement with its members, test approaches and iterate where necessary before setting further objectives with a wider stakeholder group. This would also allow stronger understanding of what the initiative is seeking to achieve which can be built upon and more realistic longer-term objectives to be built. The initiative may also decide to stay small and set very clear boundaries as to its role.

Monitor, evaluate and learn. It is important that if the initiative chooses to have objectives and goals that these are monitored and progress towards them evaluated, along with any unintended consequences. This would not have to be through extensive quantitative methods, for example it could collect stories of change based on the intended outcomes alongside any monetary shifts that could be attributed towards the initiative. Monitoring significant shifts in sectors is a significant challenge for many organisations, so the MEL system should be designed to be realistic with regards to what is feasible with the resource and capacity of the initiative, while still collecting meaningful, valuable data that can inform on its progress. Ignite and the initiative may want to develop different expectations on the units of change they can be accountable for; for instance Ignite may choose to measure its success based on changes within individual members or their organisations, while the initiative may set itself more outward focused targets.

Culture of learning and adaptation. While experimenting with new models of relationship building between donors and donors and the field, building in systematic learning, reflecting and adaptation processes will enable the model to be as agile as possible. Having a culture and practice of actively learning and adapting will ensure resources are better focused, and strengthen feelings of ownership amongst members.

This could be internal light touch reflection on a monthly basis, reflection moments as part of regular meetings with stakeholders[41] and annual or bi-annual strategic reviews. Strategic reviews should be a space for all the key stakeholders to come together and reflect on the aims and objectives of the initiative and have open, honest conversations about what is and what isn't working and how they can better approach the issue they are attempting to solve.

This would also be a good opportunity to bring new members into the process and ensure all members are still aligned on the strategic approach for the initiative.

Where insights are gained but an appropriate adaptation is not clear, a period of exploration could be set to further understand the issue and any emerging trends and discuss with key stakeholders solutions or alternatives.

Culture of transparency and openness. In order to build meaningful relationships with the field, the initiative would need to commit to and nurture a culture of transparency. This could mean different things in different scenarios, but should have minimum standards, such as publishing the initiative's strategic documents, any reviews and or/ evaluations conducted and insights from learning activities. The initiative members should be encouraged and supported to speak openly about the initiative and its learning within their own organisations, but also publicly with other donors and representatives of the field.

Build in governance. Dependent on the format of the initiative, Ignite and the members should consider how it will be governed and how a governance structure can support in the achievement of its goals. The roles and responsibilities of the governance structure should be clearly articulated.

Implementation.

Map the money.^[42] If one of the objectives of a future initiative is to raise funds, mapping existing and potential money sources and flows would be an important element to allow strategic decisions to be made as to where to expend fundraising resources. Ideally this would be conducted by a specialist in the area to ensure the depth necessary to allow these decisions to be made. This would allow prioritisation of donors and sectors with the most potential and opportunities for engagement fully leveraged.

Continuity. As the Forum found, large gaps in staffing can cause challenges in the momentum of activities and engagement of members. Where possible, plan for long-term staffing resource.

Resource hub. Dependent on the purpose of the new initiative, some respondents suggested that a curated resource hub would support them in building their own learning, as well as helping them with sharing relevant evidence and insights within their organisations. This could also support those who felt the evidence base for investing in VAC was very disparate to see what data already exists before advocating for and commissioning new evidence. However, depending on the depth expected, this would be a significant task to set up and continually manage with the necessary quality assurance.

Clear branding. In order to build understanding of the initiative outside of its core stakeholders, the development of an external brand identity may prove useful. This should also be articulated in relation to other similar entities to ensure external stakeholders can identify how the various organisations relate and complement each other. One respondent suggested an infographic that articulates how the different vehicles fit together.

Strengthening the sector. As an entity made of donors focusing on funding VAC through relationships with the field, the initiative would be a strong position to conduct its own advocacy work amongst the donor community. This could include advocating for stronger relationships more broadly with those in the field and with lived experience, encouraging donors to recruit from these organisations, having advisory panels and boards with representatives from the field and those with lived experience. This could be done in a small way such as sharing case studies of organisations who have made changes in their practices and conducting joint presentations with grantees to speak about the journey.

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings of this evaluation, we can conclude that there were some strong successes within the Forum, and it achieved, in at least significant part, two of its three aims. These were to deliver an exclusive, confidential, and trusted donor platform and to provide expertise of intersectional donor priorities and trends. The final aim was contributed to, bringing the representatives of the field into the Forum, however this was not systematic and embedded enough to qualify as the Forum playing a translational role between donors and the field.

However, when exploring the Forum's impact, there appears to have been a misalignment between the strategy of the Forum and the expectations of the donors and the members for the Forum to mobilise funds. Why this occurred is not clear as the Forum staff stated that they repeatedly attempted to engage donors and members in the strategy process, but it led to disconnect between the two.

In spite of meeting their goals, the Forum did face significant internal and external barriers. The largest of the former appears to have been the lack of ownership within the Forum members and therefore their lack of buy-in to the strategy. As a result of this lack of ownership the Forum members appeared to dis-engage around anything more substantial the Forum staff tried to propose, and none were willing to take on a "leadership role" in terms of efforts to promote VAC amongst peer donors. Some of this may have been due to the advent of Covid-19 during the Forum early years, which resulted in limited opportunities for the group to create strong in-person relationships, as well as significant challenges for the members personally and organisationally.

It also appears that the fundraising field for VAC is incredibly challenging based on a number of factors, and without the support of the members, the Forum staff were not well placed, in terms of position or capacity, to be an effective fund mobilisation mechanism. From others within the field, it appears that the best money mobilisers are those with profile and connections, which the Forum did not have ready access to.

This being said, based on the successes of the Forum outside of its initial remit, its members and the wider sector believe there is still a role for a donor collaborative focused on VAC. There was a lot of energy and momentum in VAC when the Forum was initially launched due to its inclusion in the SDGs and the launch of the INSPIRE Strategies. It was able to leverage on this and build a culture and practice of openly sharing amongst members that was widely appreciated, particularly in areas that were new to some donors, where there were challenges or where there were opportunities to collaborate. This is particularly true of the area focused on online violence as it provided an opportunity for private and bi-lateral donors to build an understanding of both of their roles within the issue area.

While during the tenure of the Forum there were a number of different entities that had similar mandates to it, two of these have since closed, leaving more space for Ignite to develop an initiative that responds to gaps in the system. However any future initiative in this area is unlikely to focus on fund mobilisation based on the above conclusions. As the new Ignite Philanthropy strategy is focusing on strengthening relationships with the field, there is an opportunity to leverage this with a new initiative. Building a theory of change that articulates the change the sector wants to see, and the roles of the various stakeholder groups, could help Ignite and donors to establish their role in the ecosystem. This could be done in partnership with representatives from the field to ensure understanding of what the field needs from a donor collaborative.

This would obviously require a significant shift in approach and thinking and would require involved stakeholders to commit to changing the dynamics of the sector in the way they engage with grantees.

There are many learnings from the work of the Forum that can be utilised in this new initiative. Key amongst these is addressing the issue of ownership with members; this could be done through the co-creation of the next iteration with commitments and roles and responsibilities clearly articulated. This should be balanced with the voices and needs of the field in support of Ignite's new strategic focus on challenging the dynamics and strengthening the relationships between donors and the field. Ignite should also consider their role in any future initiative based on the insights from the Forum's evaluation around the need for peer ownership and how the role of Ignite potentially created a dynamic that allowed donors to engage in a passive manner.

REFERENCES

[1] Important to note that current Funders Table public literature does not refer to the aim of mobilising funds, it is described as a learning and collaborative mechanism for funders focusing on climate change.

[2] The Forum had a period of c.9 months in early 2019 where activity was very limited due to a lack of capacity within Ignite to do in-depth work on it, and while the Senior Advisor was recruited. He joined the organisation in September 2019 and additional staff followed.

[3] These strategic documents were developed in consultation with the Forum funders.

[4] This was typically done around existing events that would attract members, including an event in Addis Ababa and an event in New York. Covid-19 made this element of the Forum's work very difficult post early-2020.

[5] Estimate based on discussions between members and Forum staff.

[6] It was suggested that the remits of the two streams had significant cross-over and the separation may have been arbitrary, however, there needed to be focus as the members did not have capacity to engage with more general discussions.

[7] Jeff Rowland, Senior Advisor to the Investors Forum from September 2019 to summer 2023.

[8] It was stated that this was not repeated in other focus areas and was not updated over time.

[9] One member stated that they valued the opportunity to meet grantees that their organisation was not funding.

[10] There is a broad range of opinions amongst the donors regarding this role, dependent on their individual grant agreements, as well as their organisational interests and focuses. Some were very keen that the Forum should have played this role, while others stated this was not their expectation.

[11] Important to note that some respondents cited a lack of transparency around what donors were doing within the space, resulting in a lack of awareness of who might be operating with the VAC space.

[12] Seen in the quotes in the previous section.

[13] Counting Pennies II: An analysis of official development assistance to end violence against children, 2021, World Vision.

[14] It was suggested that the bi-lateral donors, as they may have had less ability to shift priorities, appreciated what the Forum became in terms of networking and sharing learning, while some of the private donors wanted a more action-orientated group as they could move quicker in terms of mobilising funds.

[15] Important to note that this was never a condition of membership, however members were encouraged to be involved.

[16] One respondent suggested that bilateral donor agency staff may not be well placed to do donor mobilisation as they are typically civil servants. The high internal turnover of these staff was also cited as an issue as they tend to be in a role for 1-2 years.

[17] To some extent, an indication of how high a priority the institution assigned to VAC.

[18] This approach has been reviewed during the most recent strategy development and moving forward Ignite will work on building a greater public profile for itself and its initiatives.

[19] It may be of relevance to note that of these three entities, two have since closed due to challenges in fundraising and stakeholder management.

[20] Many of the Forum members were also in a number of these entities and the content and discussion was, at times, similar.

[21] 0.72% of 2020 ODA (US\$1,757.3 billion) went towards ending violence against children. Out of this total, only 12% (US\$278.5 million) is dedicated to projects exclusively focused on ending violence against children. (Counting Pennies III: An analysis of official development assistance to end violence against children, 2022, World Vision)

[22] There was not consensus on why this is the case as there is wide acknowledgement of the level of the problem.

[23] There is also often not a clear lead within organisations as it can be housed in different issue areas leading to confusion about who to connect to.

[24] As the education sector tends to measure its success by learning outcomes, and the VAC sector has traditionally struggled to present a strong case for how violence affects these, it was suggested that this was key to the lack of engagement.

REFERENCES (CONT.)

[25] The final section has a comprehensive breakdown of all the learnings from the evaluation while this section discusses the process Ignite Philanthropy could take in building another initiative.

[26] Useful to note that there are some key differences between ECFG and the Forum, however this does not, in the opinion of the author, affect the proposal.

[27] In order to have the greatest chance of success, it is recommended that a core group of these donors go on the learning journey with Ignite to understand their role in the ecosystem and the role Ignite can play. This journey would need to be designed to mitigate, acknowledge and articulate the power dynamics and how Ignite can play a role in dismantling some of the barriers within the VAC grant-making structures. This would obviously cause Ignite and its donors' challenges in accountability which would need to be managed to ensure the group was not playing lip service to changing the dynamics of the sector.

[28] Global Fund for Community Foundations website - <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/what-we-stand-for/shiftthepower/>

[29] Beyond 2%: From climate philanthropy to climate justice philanthropy, Edouard Morena, University of London Institute in Paris (ULIP), May 2022

[30] Justice Funders website - <https://justicefunders.org/resonance/guiding-values-principles/#:~:text=Related%20to%20the%20previous%20principle,solutions%20for%20their%20lives%20rather>

[31] Girls First Fund website - <https://girlsfirstfund.org/about/>

[32] Ibid

[33] It is hoped that a co-created strategy would be sufficient to continue to engage donors but it may also be necessary to explore additional incentives such as membership fees. If the eventual model had an element of grant-making this would encourage shared purpose and give clear responsibilities to the members.

[34] One respondent cautioned that any intentions to not be donor-driven need to be closely monitored as it was easy to experience mission and strategic creep as traditional roles and ways of working take over intentions.

[35] Donor Collaboratives, Keys to Success, A summary of knowledge and insights to guide the development of a donor collaborative, June 2019, Panorama

[36] It was noted within Ariadne's board, that while it was populated by members, the majority were relatively junior members of staff.

[37] International Education Funders Group, IEFG Strategy 2023 - <https://iefg.org/about/#Strategy>

[38] The powercube is a framework for analysing the levels, spaces and forms of power, and their interrelationship. It is useful in exploring various aspects of power and how they interact with each other.

[39] This could be done by someone with lived experience or with field experience to ensure the final product remains true to its initial ambitions of Ignite Philanthropy. Ignite Philanthropy could play a role in this process but should not be responsible for the facilitation.

[40] While this evaluation has made some recommendations for what this initiative may look like and the co-creation process may discuss this, these may not eventually be appropriate for what the group is seeking to achieve.

[41] This could be extended to those in the field to encourage them to share about their experiences engaging with the donor community on a regular basis.

[42] Dependent on focus of the initiative it may be worth consulting the prospecting exercise that the Forum team completed.

ANNEX ONE: ABOUT THE FORUM

Taken from a 2022 grant proposal.

The End Violence Investors Forum

The End Violence Investors Forum was launched in 2018 by a group of public and private funders to help address...[these]...challenges and to attract new donors to the cause of VAC prevention. It seeks to strengthen collaboration and the integration of investments into other fields, specifically education and online safety. The Investors Forum serves as a confidential and trusted space for donors to exchange ideas, address challenges, ask questions, share lessons, showcase best practices and, most importantly, discover ways to deliver greater impact for children together.

Ignite Philanthropy

The Investors Forum is an initiative of Ignite Philanthropy, a donor collaborative fund co-created by Oak Foundation, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, and Human Dignity Foundation. Ignite Philanthropy's mission is to contribute towards ending all violence against children by funding what other donors cannot readily support and by playing advocacy and convening roles that other stakeholders cannot play. Among its efforts, Ignite's current flagship initiatives include: capacity-building initiatives for child rights and protection grantee organisations (the Strategic Networks initiative) and the donor community (the End Violence Investors Forum), and a 60-country benchmarking index that measures national responses to sexual violence against children (the Out of the Shadows Index). These are led by a full-time team of five and supported by an array of additional part-time consultants.

The Opportunity: Increasing funding and collaboration to address violence in schools and online

The Investors Forum seeks to influence donors to increase the level and quality of resources focused on preventing violence in and through schools and online child sexual abuse. Specifically, it works to ensure that preventing violence in and through schools is recognised and prioritised by major donors. This involves engaging the education and child protection sectors to reach consensus on what works, supporting the development of the evidence base and identifying opportunities to mainstream violence prevention into education strategies and programmes.

The Investors Forum membership also focuses on preventing child sexual abuse online by funding research, actions aimed at making the tech industry more accountable, and advocating for law enforcement to apprehend traffickers and supporting survivor groups. The Forum engages funders in other sectors, such as child rights, gender and technology innovation to integrate online violence prevention into child protection and other related programmes.

Preventing violence in and through schools

A recent report from the World Bank and the Safe to Learn Global Initiative demonstrates that violence in and around schools severely impacts educational outcomes, and society pays a heavy price as a result, with an estimated \$11 trillion in lost lifetime earnings (World Bank 2021).

The study highlighted that violence in schools – including physical, emotional, and sexual violence – is widespread in most countries. It profoundly affects students' experience in schools, leading to, among others, lower grades, more absence from schools, fewer friendships, and less trust in teachers. This contributes to children dropping out of school and learning less in school, leading, in turn, to losses in earnings in adulthood. Violence in schools also has a wide range of negative effects not only for mental health and psychological well-being, but also for multiple physical ailments.

This evidence underlines the importance of embedding violence prevention in Education systems and ensuring all schools prioritise safe learning environments for all.

Preventing child sexual abuse online

The We Protect 2019 Global Threat Assessment concluded that the “scale, severity and complexity of online child sexual abuse is increasing at a faster pace than those aiming to tackle the activity can respond, with referrals from industry and law enforcement partners reaching record highs”.

The increasing pace of technological evolution, offender behaviour, coupled with challenges that law enforcement and practitioners working with children face, has seen exploitation and abuse of children increasing in recent years. These concerns have been compounded by COVID-19, with a recent study highlighting that law enforcement officers and frontline responders across the globe reported increased cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the pandemic (The impact of covid-19 on the risk of online child sexual exploitation and the implications for child protection and policing, University of New South Wales, 2021).

ANNEX TWO: EVALUATION INTERVIEWEES

1. Jeff Rowland, Ignite Philanthropy [former]
2. Don Cipriani, Ignite Philanthropy
3. Alex Christopoulos, Ignite Philanthropy [former]
4. Brigitte De Lay, Oak Foundation
5. Kathleen Flynn-Dapaah, Global Affairs Canada
6. Maureen Greenwood-Basken, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
7. Jane Leek and Will Kent, Porticus
8. Seán Coughlan, Human Dignity Foundation [former]
9. Britta Holmberg, World Childhood Foundation
10. Annette Cassar, European Commission
11. Thrisha Halda, Indigo Trust
12. Harleen Walia, CIFF
13. Howard Taylor, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children
14. Chloë Fèvre, Safe to Learn [former]
15. Heather Hamilton, ECFG
16. Giulia Barnhisel, ECD Networks Fund