

synergos sustainability report 2007

INTRODUCTION

This summary of Synergos' efforts to create a sustainable organization reflects our commitment to transparency and accountability. The structure of this report draws upon frameworks developed by the Global Reporting Initiative and Keystone Accountability. Sustainability reporting is new for Synergos, and we intend to improve our efforts in coming years. Your feedback on this report is most welcome and can be sent to synergos@synergos.org.

OVERVIEW

All of Synergos' work is directed to reduce poverty, increase equity and promote social justice. We believe that tackling these complex issues requires systemic change, and the participation of all of the key stakeholders who are part of the system. Synergos believes that significant and sustainable systems change occurs when we tap the wisdom of everyone, including business, government, civil society and those most adversely affected by the problem being addressed. Our role is to support and facilitate system innovation by drawing out the knowledge and experience of stakeholders, not to prescribe an external solution. Through the years we have gained valuable experience identifying ways to do this.

In June 2007, the Synergos Board of Directors approved a new organizational strategy, which will focus on supporting bridging leaders and institutions, inclusive partnerships and knowledge sharing to make the greatest possible impact on poverty and social justice. We have also restructured to bring the staff supporting our various leadership networks

together, and planned more ways to help them be of greater service by enhancing the breadth of staff expertise and more effectively connecting members to one another, to ideas and to helpful resources.

We are also planning a major new initiative to better capture and share organizational knowledge within Synergos and to all others included in the global development field. Currently, Synergos offers workshops, trainings, convenings, peer learning opportunities and free downloadable resources on our Website. In 2008, we plan to develop a Knowledge Sharing Center, which will offer more opportunities for our networks and the greater development field to share ideas and learn from one another's work. We will also promote web-linked social networks, host convenings and create practical materials for the benefit of others working to promote social progress.

Synergos is a nonprofit corporation, registered as a 501(c)(3) in the state of New York. The Synergos Institute Canada is a Canadian federal non-share capital corporation with registered charity status. In 2007, Synergos Southern Africa was also formally registered as a South African nonprofit development organization.

GOVERNANCE

Our Board actively participates in the overall planning for the organization, overseeing the chief executive's responsibilities, and makes sure he has the professional support he needs to further the goals of the organization. The Board approves the an-

nual budget, ensures that Synergos adheres to legal standards and ethical norms, determines which programs are consistent with the organization's mission, and monitors their effectiveness.

Synergos has a 22-person Board of Directors. The officers include president, chair, treasurer and secretary. Eight Board members are female and five are persons of color. Half of our Board members represent countries outside of the United States, and seven represent developing countries.

Synergos Board members sit for a total of four three-year terms unless they are a sitting committee chair, in which case they may still be re-elected. The chair serves without term limits. Synergos' Board currently meets twice a year. None of the Board members are compensated for their work with Synergos.

The Synergos Board has six standing committees: finance (with investment and audit subcommittees), nominating and governance, development, program and planning, management and executive. These committees meet two to three times a year.

THE SYNERGOS COMMUNITY

The nature of Synergos' work requires the engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, from civil society organizations, philanthropy, business and government, as well as representatives of poor and marginalized communities. We work to identify and engage stakeholders who are often disempowered, valuing their wisdom and experience and building community capacity to sustain change.

Our partnerships create a "safe space" for diverse stakeholders to begin to work together to address the underlying causes of poverty, inequity and social injustice. In addition, our networks allow global philanthropists and civil society leaders to help each other further their work.

Stakeholders from different parts of society often have a divergence of goals and values. To overcome this, our projects use social technologies that open lines of communication, create shared experiences and build trusting relationships. We also build local capacity to make the results of these collaborations sustainable.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Synergos makes substantial efforts to maintain a responsible and transparent fiscal environment. In 2007, Charity Navigator, the United States' most-used evaluator of nonprofit organizations, recognized Synergos with its highest four-star rating, for its fiscal responsibility.

Every year, Synergos hires an independent firm to conduct a financial audit. The financial data resulting from each audit is printed for the public in the annual report. Our donors also hold us accountable for our work, requiring us to submit regular reports, and sometimes engaging us in a formal evaluation process. One example of this occurred last year in our Partnership for Child Nutrition in India, where START, a group dedicated to analyzing global change, completed a valuable independent assessment of our under-nutrition project in India. The recommendations from this assessment helped inform the strategic direction of the initiative. Last year, Synergos also developed a new donor tracking system so it could more accurately report to donors how we use their funds.

The Synergos Board's Investment Committee in 2007 approved an investment policy for its new Board-restricted fund, initially placing roughly 25% of the fund in mission-driven investments. It is our intention to increase this percentage over time.

To help ensure long-term financial stability, Synergos launched the Campaign for the Future in late 2007. The campaign has the goal of raising \$20 million to support innovation and program development.

PROGRAM IMPACTS

In 2007 Synergos' efforts made a direct contribution to the betterment of the lives of poor and marginalized communities, including community empowerment, improved service delivery, strengthening civil society leaders and institutions, increasing philanthropic resources, and public policy changes.

Last year, we began to see results in the Partnership for Child Nutrition in India, and expect to have initial findings about the impact of this multi-sectoral partnership to report in 2008. Synergos has also begun developing a more rigorous monitoring and evaluation system for all its work. This system will help evaluate program outcomes and enhance program quality; inform our Board, partners and donors of the impacts programs are making; and provide new ways to share learnings across programs. Initially, Synergos is focusing on our networks, in particular, the Global Philanthropists Circle and Senior Fellows. The methods used in this evaluation are also informing the assessment of some of Synergos' other programs, such as the U.S.-Mexico Border Philanthropy Partnership and the Middle East and North Africa Social Innovators Program, in clarifying goals, expected outcomes and indicators. Work on these will be ongoing in 2008. Synergos is also ensuring that strong monitoring and evaluation systems are integrated into all new projects.

Because of the breadth of Synergos' work, there are challenges in trying to assess the entirety of our work. For one, our programs have a range of impacts, on the individuals who participate in our

partnerships and networks, the organizations those individuals represent and support, the communities we seek to empower and the lives of the poor and marginalized people we seek to improve. Depending on the initiative and our involvement, we impact some of these people and organizations more than others, and there doesn't currently exist a single form of evaluation that can calculate the impacts on all of these parties.

In addition, Synergos seeks to create systemic change, the results of which can only be seen over time. A partnership started this year may only make real progress several years from now. Also, given the vast scope of issues relating to poverty and social injustice, it is difficult to measure how we've ultimately impacted issues versus other factors, which could include environment, political climate and social developments. As we move forward, we are dedicated to finding better ways to measure the impact of our programs.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Synergos is dedicated to reducing our impact on the environment. We have begun buying carbon credits to offset the footprint of our travel and other activities. In 2007 we offset the equivalent of 1036.8 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. Also, more than 85% of the paper we use is recycled or sustainably produced. In replacing our old computer systems, we donated computers to three nonprofit organizations in New York City. The New York Life Building, where Synergos' headquarters are housed, was among five Manhattan properties to earn the "Energy Star" designation from the EPA in 2007.

WORKPLACE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Synergos currently has 37 full-time staff and three part-time staff, and is 29% male and 71% female.

The staff has grown slightly from 2006, when we had 36 full-time staff and two part-time staff.

In 2007, as Synergos approved a new strategic direction for the organization, we began to strengthen staff competencies and skills to be able to complete the work of the new strategy, reviewed and modified job descriptions, and restructured job classifications for the entire staff. We also established a new performance management system to help staff with goal setting, and began to compensate staff through a merit-based system that rewards high performance.

We are committed to creating a workplace that fosters openness, as well as professional and personal fulfillment. To that end, we have an open-door policy with all senior staff and executives, and offer periodic open forums with our CEO, where the agenda is set by staff. We have increased the amount of in-house trainings, brown bag luncheons, and individualized trainings, as well as allocated more funds to professional development. We also offer staff two days a year for community service, which can be completed individually or with larger staff teams. Last year, we organized an educational visit to a local New York City school, and a food drive.

A retreat and wilderness experience in Montana helped staff members better understand some of the methodologies we use in our work. They spent a week reflecting on their personal sense of purpose and identifying ways to be better collaborators and to create a more healthy and productive workplace culture at Synergos.

Synergos values diversity. Our staff comes from more than a dozen countries and has members who are fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Afrikaans, Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Marathi, Punjabi, Tagalog, Thai, Yoruba, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Urdu and Xhosa, among nearly 30 languages.

As a global organization, it is critical that Synergos be connected globally to all of its offices. Over the past year, Synergos installed new computer systems in all of its offices.

OUR VALUES

Synergos seeks to be a values-driven organization. We try to act consistently with our core values — social justice, collaboration, innovation, integrity and compassion — in our relationships with all our stakeholders and in all of our programs, projects and activities. Our staff and Board are governed by a conflict of interest policy, and we compensate staff on a merit-based system that incorporates an assessment of each employee's modeling of our values.

During the past year, a staff values committee worked to help embed Synergos values into everyday policies and practices. The team held interactive discussions with staff groups, offered guidance in meetings about new initiatives and held regular office hours to be accessible to staff members with questions or problems.

FEEDBACK

Synergos welcomes your comments and suggestions about this report and the ways it could be improved in future years. Please write to synergos@synergos.org.

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