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A GRANTCRAFT CASE STORY

Small Mothers, Musicians and Mathematics

IN THE GUIDE:

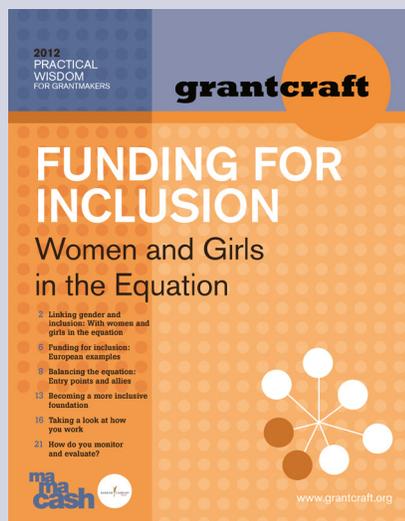
Linking gender and inclusion: With women and girls in the equation

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In 2012, GrantCraft published *Funding for Inclusion – Women and Girls in the Equation* to provide practitioners in European foundations inspiration and ideas on how to play a more active role in improving the position of women and girls worldwide. The guide explores a number of entry points for engaging in a dialogue about gender and provides practical ideas on how foundations can be more inclusive.

This case story, “Small Mothers, Musicians and Mathematics,” describes an example of a foundation in Turkey that works in urban communities to address social injustice and is deliberate in targeting girls with their activities and services. When you do this in Turkey, there are great rewards, as Mesut Gökdağ, a volunteer at the Basak Culture and Arts Foundation, explains.

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Small Mothers, Musicians and Mathematics

In poor areas of Istanbul, there is nothing simple and straightforward about reaching out and connecting with girls and women and involving them in creative and educational activities.

The Basak Culture and Arts Foundation, established in 2002, targets youngsters, children and, in general, disadvantaged families that migrated to Istanbul from different parts of Turkey and include children who work or have dropped out of school. The Basak Foundation works in the suburbs of Istanbul, in the Kadıköy, Maltepe and Üsküdar-neighbourhoods – areas populated with poor people, often migrants from other parts of Turkey. Basak provides direct support to children and their families through the organisation of creative activities (dance, drama, music, sports) and support in mathematics and English language to middle school and high school students. They also undertake research, such as participatory research into the effects of crime. Currently Basak is developing a programme around domestic violence.

Basak's mission is to discover, support and promote the artistic abilities of young people from poor families and to eliminate the difficulties they face in building their personal capacity. Basak is not a women's organisation, yet at its very foundation it has enshrined in its statutes a positive emphasis on girls. Moreover, it aims to ensure that 70 percent of its beneficiaries are girls or women.

Why is there a commitment to girls and women? The founders of the Basak Foundation strive to address injustice and inequality, and in Turkey, gender is an important dimension of inequality. "Girls are more discriminated against. If a family has some sort of possibility, resources, or opportunities, it normally always benefits the boys," says Mesut Gökdağ. "Unfortunately this is how things are, and because of traditions, girls can be deprived of education rather easily; for example in Turkish we say they are 'small mothers' that stay at home to care for their siblings."

All the same, the foundation does not exclusively target women and girls. "The research and the field-work we did when the foundation was established showed that all children and youngsters who are coming from poor families need support. It would have been wrong to work only with girls and women. Yet, it was also always obvious that among our target group, girls are more disadvantaged compared to boys, which is the reason for our positive discrimination policy."

In poor areas of Istanbul, there is nothing simple and straightforward about reaching out and connecting with girls and women and involving them in creative and educational activities. But because the foundation is so deliberate about involving girls, Basak is successful in serving them. In 2011, in all the mathematics support classes that Basak organised, girls outnumbered boys two to one. In the English classes for children and

youngsters comparatively even more girls participate. Yoga classes were attended exclusively by girls and women. In arts activities the balance was 50-50. Although boys outnumber girls in guitar and theatre classes for 7-11 year olds, girls were very much involved in music and theatre activities for 12-16 year olds. Overall in 2011, 65 percent of Basak's beneficiaries were girls and women.

Mesut describes how Basak works: "We have always been very close to the community; this is typical for our way of working, because if you are distant you do not reach these families, you do not reach the boys and girls that really need your support." Involving girls and getting them to participate in activities benefits from proximity between foundation and community. Explains Mesut: "Families want to keep girls in the house. So it is key to have the trust of the family... As an organisation you have to be very open to the families, when they see what you do, with their own eyes, then after some time they will let their child, their girls come to you; this takes time."

Eventually there is a multiplier effect: "Now after 10 years," Mesut proudly points out, "the kids that first participated in our activities are volunteers of the foundation and they are a role model to others. Our web of volunteers reaches out to families and brings in girls that can really benefit from our activities."

Mesut observes another aspect that is important in the work of the foundation with girls: "What is important is that girls are role models to other girls and sometime even for their family! For example a colleague, also a volunteer at Basak, when she had finished primary school her parents decided she had to stay home, she was only going out to do shopping for the household. But she attended workshops and activities of the foundation. She even participated in activity abroad, in Scotland. And when she came back she started going to music school and she studied. She has taken exams to graduate from secondary school and now she studies in university. Her parent were often giving her a hard time when she wanted to participate in activities from the foundation and study music, and now they come to concerts and are proud of her. Over a period of seven years, her family changed their views completely and she can do anything. In those early days our director had to go to her parents' house to talk to them when they had conflicts, and now the parents support her. And young, 12 year olds that we work with now have similar pressure, but they know that things can change: she is their role model."

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Trust takes time to build but can be easily lost. Basak Culture and Arts Foundation is very careful to honour the relationship of trust they have with families. The fact that they are embedded in the neighbourhood makes that easier. But it is important to manage the risks that can undermine that trust, observes Mesut. “When girls that have come to the foundation for activities do things their parent do not agree with, then parents easily say ‘it is this foundation that is putting bad ideas in the head of our daughters and those ideas spread rapidly.’ So we are very open and we put a lot of time in building and maintaining this relation of trust. It happened that a girl said to her parent that she was with us, but she was not. And when the parents came and asked, we were completely open and we said ‘no, she is not with us, she has not participated in any activity’. We have to do that, we have to make sure parents trust us.”

The example suggests that in Turkey, bringing women and girls in the equation is about:

- acknowledging the additional disadvantages that girls face;
- deliberately reaching out to girls and their families;
- involving young women from the community as role models for girls; and
- staying close to the communities served, nurturing relations of trust and being transparent.



The GrantCraft guide “Funding for Inclusion – Women and Girls in the Equation” (available in English) draws on examples of European funders to provide practitioners with ideas and tips on how to channel more resources to activities that address gender inequality. The guide can be downloaded for free **through this link**. A visual summary is available in **English** and **Turkish**. These resources are part of the GrantCraft series. Resources in this series are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions; rather they are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion and suggest possibilities.

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