



2020 Report of Activities



SYNERGOS
Building trust works

Contents

Overview	3
Our Approach: Bridging Leadership	4
Partnership Programs	5
Nigeria: Agricultural Transformation.....	5
Ethiopia: Agriculture & Nutrition	6
Namibia: Health and Nutrition	7
Bangladesh: Drowning Prevention	9
Mexico: Bridging Leadership cohort.....	10
Networks.....	10
Arab World: Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Employment	10
Philanthropy.....	11
Highlight: Philanthropy in Brazil	12
David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award & the Synergos Gathering.....	13
Thought Leadership	14
Bridging Leadership video series.....	14
Report: Funding from a Place of Trust	15
Case Studies on Inner Work for Social Change.....	15



Overview

As a global organization solving complex issues around the world by advancing Bridging Leadership, Synergos operates on the belief that working together across divides produces more and better solutions than working alone. The Covid-19 pandemic that continues to sweep through the globe has brought into sharp focus Synergos' effort to transform how people across sectors come together, develop deeper understanding, create shared vision, and take collective action to solve deeply entrenched problems.

The year 2020 revealed, like never before, the interconnectedness of all life on the planet, as the global pandemic wreaked havoc on people, societies and economies. In the last year, billions of people have shared an experience of disruption, uncertainty, and fear.

At Synergos we view this time as one of choice for humanity and an opportunity for the emergence of new forms of leadership needed to move from fragmentation and destruction to the creation of new, generative, and more loving ways of being in relationship with ourselves, with each other and with the natural world. Synergos has therefore been seeking to model, in its approach and implementation, for world we want to become.

Throughout 2020 Synergos adapted to the repercussions of the global pandemic. To that end, we designed a virtual programming strategy and reinvented our activities and events, including our annual global gathering, to connect with all our stakeholders where they are—safely at home. Our virtual programming was designed to achieve more than a mere translation of content from in-person gatherings to online webinars and events. Rather, we viewed it as a major step in strengthening our online presence and platform to open our bridging leadership strategy to broader audiences around the world. Concurrently, we experienced serious delays in many of our in-country programs supporting agriculture, health, and social impact work, requiring postponement of activities and reimagining of program design.

During this difficult year Synergos was able to pivot successfully to a fully remote working model. We focused on the health and safety of our staff around the world through a series of support services to promote resilience for employees and their families. We also focused on the financial health of the organization, through careful budget management and other measures designed to weather the crisis and ensure long-term sustainability.

Our Approach: Bridging Leadership

Bridging leadership represents a paradigm shift in our approach to leadership: a movement away from hierarchy, control, and fear toward more inclusive forms of problem-solving. A migration from a world in which power is monopolized to one in which power is shared, enabling more effective interventions and longer-lasting impact.

Three essential elements characterize Bridging Leadership:

- **Inner Work.** Increasing awareness of the self, others, and the larger system. Aligning individual intentions for authentic action.
- **Skill Development.** Learning to use proven tools for analyzing social problems systemically. Employing strategies to build trust among stakeholders that do not normally work together.
- **Collaboration.** Working with key stakeholders to leverage collective resources and action. Building sustainable relationships that can carry the partnership forward.

The Bridging leadership approach works on multiple levels, including the individual, institutional, and collective action levels:

Individual

Help people use carefully-honed skills to foster true collaboration across divides. Being a bridging leader requires emotional security and humility. It means reserving judgment and respecting the opinions, and perspectives of all people. It means deeply understanding the views of others, even if we may not agree.

Institutional

Like individuals, organizations can also embody bridging leadership traits to facilitate partnerships across divides for social benefit. Bridging institutions exist in all sectors, from the private sector to civil society to government.

Collective Action

We do this both within and among organizations and communities. Effective change requires deeper understanding, shared vision, and collaborative problem-solving among stakeholders.

In 2020, Synergos continued to infuse the Bridging Leadership Approach across all its activities, spanning its work across various countries and in the philanthropy sector, as described in the following sections. We also began to support other organizations with integrating the approach in their programs: a highlight in 2020 was the development a Bridging Leadership workshop in partnership with Ashoka University in Mumbai. The year 2020 also marked the completion of a major initiative involving the Inner Work component of

the Bridging Leadership Approach. This is described in more detail in the section on Knowledge and Case Studies.

Partnership Programs

Nigeria: Agricultural Transformation

Synergos has been active in Nigeria for the last six years, aiming to reduce poverty among smallholder farmers by facilitating collaborations to shift from subsistence farming to small, medium, and large-scale businesses. Through the State Partnership of Agriculture (SPA), Synergos formed a strategic convening platform of key agricultural stakeholders to prioritize initiatives and deliver on agricultural interventions. Through an advisory service to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), Synergos helped strengthen the performance of key senior advisors to the Ministry. The example that follows illustrates the results of these interventions in one of the three states in which Synergos has been active.

Benue State – known as the food basket of Nigeria – leads the country on scale and diversity in agricultural production, including soybeans, citrus fruits, and tubers. However, while the state has the potential to feed the whole country, its production has been far below full capacity. Synergos helped the state create its first-ever coordinated plan to address key bottlenecks in production, including infrastructure, financing, training, technology, legal systems, and other crucial mechanisms. The program also took into consideration deeply entrenched systemic challenges such as gender inequality and climate change that stymie growth alongside agriculture-specific factors.

Staggering levels of poverty and malnutrition persist in communities where agriculture is the leading industry and employer. Mutually reinforcing factors across food systems and society have historically prevented rural communities from transcending extreme poverty. Raising productivity, which requires a new frame of reference and high levels of coordination among many players, is key to breaking the cycle.

Leading an inclusive effort among government, business leaders, and farmers in Benue, the Synergos Nigeria team has helped systemically analyze the state's flagging agriculture sector and diagnose the many interconnected factors that keep farmers under-producing, disconnected from markets, and stuck in poverty. In a series of workshops organized by SPA, government and business leaders engaged directly with farmers and – thanks in part to the adoption Bridging Leadership principles – began the hard work of building consensus on priority actions.

The Benue State Policy on Agriculture introduced in 2019 was the culmination of a multi-year effort on the part of the state government, farmers groups, the private sector, technical experts, and universities, and Synergos as a convener. The plan sets clear, measurable goals for transforming Benue's agricultural economy, among them to reduce post-harvest losses by 50 percent and increase farmer income by 80 percent by 2021. Importantly, the plan detailed a strategy for achieving the goals, delegated responsibilities and financing, and sets up accountability systems to track progress.

In 2020, the systemic, inclusive approach used to devise this first-of-its-kind policy was implemented as the state continues to progress toward higher productivity and better livelihoods for farming families.

Building on prior work, in 2020 Synergos secured new commitments to support the Ministry of Agriculture in the states of Kaduna and Niger and to strengthen the agricultural warehouse systems in one of these states.

Ethiopia: Agriculture & Nutrition

In late 2019, based on its track record of success in helping strengthen the agricultural sector in Ethiopia, Synergos was selected as the implementing partner by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in an initiative aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of the MoA. The goal of the initiative is to develop and implement an effective organizational structure by reengineering talent acquisition, work force planning, performance management, reward and compensation, learning and development, career management, succession planning, and knowledge management systems to enable the Ministry of Agriculture to better serve both male and female smallholder farmers.

Synergos is supporting the MoA in seven major areas, and made progress in 2020 toward the first four:

- **Align MoA's vision, strategic direction and priorities, and organizational structure.** Synergos facilitated a review of the current organizational vision, strategic directions and priorities, organizational chart, policies, and other relevant documentation and determined the drivers/issues that influence the MoA's organizational structure. The process identified gaps and opportunities for development, and then set the benchmarks against well-performing institutions' organizational structures.
- **Design an improved Governance System, with a detailed organization chart, role profiles, governance arrangements, and job descriptions.** This is a key deliverable under the program. Synergos assessed the various sectors of the ministry – including HR, Livestock, Horticulture, Natural Resource and Food Security, Agricultural Development, Extension



and Outreach, and other key sectors – to identify gaps and improvement opportunities and document key findings and strategic imperatives for the MoA. Based on the findings, a high-level operating and capability map was defined and developed, and structural options were recommended.

- **Build broad-based change management capabilities.** Synergos developed a change readiness survey to engage MoA employees, the first in an annual series that will be collected to identify and help address employee concerns. Synergos has facilitated regular meetings and workshops with staff at different levels of the MoA to help shape a strong working culture.
- **Engage key partners to raise awareness and secure buy-in and support.** The Minister of Agriculture has been engaged with other ministries and the Prime Minister’s Office to secure buy-in on job grading and salary adjustments. Synergos has supported this process as requested.

The three other pillars of the project, to be implemented beginning next year, include a) enhancing leadership capabilities to equip the Ministry’s leadership team with change management techniques and strategies; b) establishing a learning and staffing development center and c) developing merit-based recruitment and promotion practices.

Namibia: Health and Nutrition

In 2020, Synergos continued its work as an implementing partner for the African Collaborative for Health Financing Solutions (ACS) project, building on the previous

decade of experience in strengthening the health sector in Namibia. The project focuses on helping Namibia achieve universal health coverage (UHC) for all citizens.

Alongside partners, Synergos is exploring and supporting the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS) to advance the broader UHC agenda. Synergos' assessment has informed the three core objectives:

- Support to multi-stakeholder platforms for accountability and application of knowledge in a subset of Sub-Saharan African countries.
- Facilitate a knowledge exchange and implementation support between African countries on essential topics like health financing, technical implementation, and administration.
- Support regional bodies, networks, and NGO coalitions as they advocate to and partner with government entities.

Structuring a national universal healthcare system is a mammoth undertaking that will take years of intra-sector partnership and additional funding commitments. In 2020, Synergos continued to contribute to lay the groundwork for this objective, including:

- Leading a series of meetings with government and health sector leaders to draft a high-level plan for Namibia's UHC system.
- Providing support to the MoHSS to re-constitute existing structures and establish new ones to carry the UHC plan forward.
- Facilitating a leadership workshop to strengthen the MoHSS's capacity to carry the UHC plan forward. Attendees included Ministry executives and the lead staff members. The goal was to broker consensus on what defines UHC in the Namibian context and build leadership capacity through reflective exercises and sharing of the experiences of leaders from other African countries.

Using the Synergos bridging leadership approach, we are framing a common understanding and further engaging stakeholders in clarifying a vision for UHC in the Namibian context. Synergos and partners are currently defining the minimum health services package that the UHC plan should guarantee and conducting a costing study. The team is also developing a package for HIV/AIDS epidemic control that includes both prevention and treatment with the MoHSS. Like many of its neighbors, Namibia has been historically devastated by epidemic levels of HIV/AIDS infection, with 12 percent of its population still HIV positive in 2018.

Synergos also completed a landscape analysis of sustainable health financing strategies that can fund HIV/AIDS response services long-term. The next steps include aiding the

government as it institutes methods to track and manage health expenditures and reduce inefficiencies in the system, especially those in its HIV/AIDS response efforts.

Bangladesh: Drowning Prevention

Child drowning is the leading cause of death among children under 5 in Bangladesh. The Drowning Prevention Partnership (DPP), funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies and facilitated by Synergos, brings together partners working across a multitude of early childhood care and development issues and requisite government agencies to elevate awareness, drive action, and boost investment in preventing child drowning.

Daycare is a proven, effective tool for preventing child drowning at the systemic level. Based on data from the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research in Bangladesh, drowning fell by 70% in areas where community creches were opened. While childcare centers help minimize the number of child deaths, a broader base of leadership, co-ownership, and partnership is crucial for effecting lasting benefits for children.

Synergos saw the need for a coordinated effort to address the systemic causes of child drowning—one that engages government agencies, political endorsement, and non-government actors. The DPP was formed as a coalition engaging government agencies, community groups, and NGOs. It has maximized its impact by widening its scope to engage organizations across early childhood development (ECD) and the child health and welfare sectors alongside those focused on the niche of drowning prevention. Through the alliance with the Bangladesh ECD Network, Synergos helped the DPP cultivate cross-sector partnerships and develop an integrated plan for childcare centers.

Advocacy work with the government to take up and scale integrated childcare centers was delayed, due to initial government shutdowns and instances of officials falling sick to Covid-19. In 2020, meetings and events with partners and stakeholders largely moved online due to the pandemic. Despite these setbacks, in 2020, the DPP reached a pivotal milestone: thanks to collaborative advocacy, a proposed scaling program for integrated child-care and safety was included in the priority approval list of the Government's Annual Development Plan.

Towards transitioning to a sustainable locally-owned solution, Synergos designed the Nurturing Care Project to promote comprehensive outcomes for young children across Bangladesh, alleviating their vulnerability to critical injuries, especially drowning. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs has earmarked resources for the centers, an essential step for further government funding.

Mexico: Bridging Leadership cohort

In 2020, Synergos launched the fourth phase of its Bridging Leadership program to build support for leaders in Mexico to engage in multi-sectoral partnerships to address socio-economic challenges in their communities. The goal of the program is to create a community of learning and practice with structured learning around the elements of Synergos' partnership approach. In the fourth phase, a cohort of 20 leaders from a variety of sectors in the state of Guanajuato were selected for the program. While implementation of the program experienced significant delays due to the pandemic, the Mexico design team worked to improve the curriculum design adopting the teaching for understanding method, working on four modules: *Building Trust*, *Inner Work*, *Bridging Leadership*, and *Systems Thinking*. The first session with the cohort of 20 leaders took place in the fourth quarter of 2020 through an in-person, socially distanced gathering of participants.

Networks

Arab World: Social Entrepreneurship & Youth Employment

Synergos has been active in the Arab World for over 12 years, promoting social entrepreneurship as a vehicle for social and economic growth and strengthening the employability of youth. Synergos' signature Pioneers program supports individuals who possess a viable idea or initiative to address pressing social and economic issues in their communities; and youth who are making the difficult transition from education to employment, particularly those who do not enjoy access to networking, leadership development, and employment opportunities. The program provides training, mentoring, networking, peer learning, leadership development, and volunteer opportunities for youth. It also grants financial awards to social entrepreneurs (Pioneers) to advance their ventures; seed funding to start-ups to help them launch new initiatives.

Synergos entered into a partnership with the Specific Union for Farmer Women (SUFW) in Jordan to expand the Pioneers program to the country of Jordan, with work beginning in 2020. Despite delays caused by the global pandemic and the resulting lockdown in Jordan, SUWF and the Synergos project team achieved the following results:

- Finalized the application format and process for the selection of program participants.
- Reviewed over 200 applications, and selected 5 social entrepreneurs (Pioneers) and 28 start-up social entrepreneurs to participate in the program. Of the 33 participants, 13 are women.
- Provided in-person and online training to social entrepreneurs and supported the production of videos for marketing purposes.

- Recruited 500 youth to participate in the youth leadership component of the program and provided the initial leadership training.

Philanthropy

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Synergos organized regular virtual gatherings (regional and global) for Global Philanthropists Circle members to connect, share actions, and find potential opportunities for collaboration. This suite of virtual programming began in the second quarter of 2020 and ran throughout the year. These live broadcasts spanned across three subject areas:

- Cultivate the Mind – a digital space for the most pressing conversations of our time, with an orientation to lifelong learning and seeking collective solutions;
- Cultivate the Soul – “Hands-on” sessions offered in partnership with Synergos’ Spiritual Civilization community to practice inner work and increase consciousness of the ideals that drive us. The Spiritual Civilization Group is an affinity group of the Global Philanthropists Circle; and
- Cultivate Action – an introduction to the concept of a Collective Action Lab, with pilot initiatives that led to a fully fleshed out Lab concept by the end of 2020.

Overall, Synergos held more than 30 sessions throughout the year, engaging over 1,500 attendees across the Synergos networks.



A selection of topics is provided below for the Cultivate the Mind and Cultivate the Soul rubrics:

- The View from Home: Conversations about our common future
- Intentional Action for Racial Justice
- Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation
- Discovery and Healing: Post-Covid-19 Reflections from Italy
- New Leadership for the New Normal
- Emerging from Crisis through Inclusion
- New views on Trust in Philanthropy
- Art for Purpose and Social Change
- Inner Work for Social Change Virtual Learning Series (four sessions)
- Rx Healing Circles: Aligning Truth & Intent for Transformation
- Making Death an Ally for Living Our Fullest Life
- Resilience and Wellbeing for Effective Social Change
- Energy Healing: The Next Health Frontier
- Moving Beyond Empathy to Compassion
- Making Death an Ally for Living Our Fullest Life
- Igniting Secular Spirituality
- Presence in Chaos

As part of our Cultivate Action agenda, Synergos has supported a group of philanthropists in Brazil who, out of mutual concern and desire for intervention in the Amazon Rainforest, united to explore ways to create meaningful impact. With Synergos leading the process, the group has defined their values and collective intention to act in the Amazon and agreed on the criteria for intervention to put shared vision into practice. While continuing to grow and challenge one another on the journey to concrete collective action, the group is currently assessing which initiatives to support.

Also, as part of our Cultivate Action efforts, Synergos launched three new collaborative communities for Circle members and beyond, supported with funding from the members themselves: The Global Dialogue Initiative, Climate and Environment, and Funders of Spirituality and Mindfulness.

Highlight: Philanthropy in Brazil

Synergos continues to strengthen philanthropic practices across Latin America, with a theme of intergenerational legacies and developing more agile and strategic solutions. In Brazil, over the last thirty years, Synergos has contributed to strengthening Brazilian civil society and growing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Synergos Brazil has become a thought leader in Latin America, operating out of São Paulo, and promoting philanthropy through programs, regional networks, support for individuals and families, collective action, and advisory services. Bridging leadership is reflected in all aspects of our services.

With a focus on advancing philanthropy and the personal development of philanthropists, a few years ago Synergos Brazil launched the Bridging Leadership for Social Investment Program, a curriculum developed specifically for the next generation of philanthropists. The fourth program cohort completed the program in 2020, with a curriculum that was adapted to an online format, due to the pandemic. Several alumni have integrated bridging leadership into their family programs and foundations to amplify the impact of their efforts.

David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award & the Synergos Gathering

Synergos hosted the 2020 David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Awards online together with the Synergos Global Gathering, a virtual week of events intended for philanthropists, social leaders, and changemakers to gather, connect, and discuss themes of Racial Equity, Inner Work, Climate Change, Human Rights, Covid-19, and philanthropy at-large. Over three days, members of Synergos global network came together in a series of online sessions to explore building the kind of leadership needed to create a most just, peaceful, and regenerative world.

Three outstanding individuals were recognized with the David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award:

- Marc Benioff, Founder, Chair & CEO, Salesforce
- Christiana Figueres, Founding Partner, Global Optimism
- Eddie Ndopu, United Nations Secretary-General's Global Advocate for Sustainable Development

The interactive convenings that surrounded the main event were organized around the topics Cultivate the Soul, Cultivate the Mind, and Collective Action. Topics included:

- Cultivate the Mind:
 - Protecting People in a Pandemic: Human Rights & Covid-19
 - Re-connecting to the Web of Life
 - Power & Representation in Media
 - Open Networking: Inclusive Systems

- Cultivate the Soul:
 - Moving from Fear to Presence in Uncertain Times
 - Navigational Skills for a Changing World
 - Open Networking: Inner Work
- Collective Action:
 - A Healthy Planet for the Future (limited to Synergos GPC members)
 - Open Networking: Collaboration

Participation in the David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award and most Synergos Global Gathering sessions was offered free-of-charge. Sessions were held in three different time zones to reach our audiences around the world. *See event videos at syngs.info/sgg2020.*

Thought Leadership

Following are highlights, publications, and videos produced during the reporting period.

Bridging Leadership video series

In 2020, Synergos launched a video series on the Bridging Leadership Approach, focusing on key aspects of Bridging Leadership. The videos feature Synergos' CEO and other team members and describe how Bridging Leadership represents a paradigm shift in our approach to leadership: a movement away from less-inclusive forms of decision-making that have dominated much of human history. The video series includes an overview of Bridging Leadership as well as modules on inner work, systems thinking, listening skills, and collaboration. The videos have been shared with our networks and are on the Synergos YouTube channel. *Watch at syngs.info/sav.*

Drowning Prevention Toolkit

As part of our partnership work on drowning prevention in Bangladesh, the drowning prevention toolkit released by Synergos in 2020 draws information from research, studies, evaluation reports, and video documentation of key initiatives in the sector. These include the WHO's Global Report on Drowning, which analyzes the risks of drowning across the world; the Saving of Lives from Drowning project, carried out by two local institutions in Bangladesh and overseen by Johns Hopkins University, which reached 80,000 Bangladeshi children; and Project Bhasa ("float" in Bengali), undertaken by The Centre for Injury Prevention and Research in Bangladesh, which carried out evidence-based drowning prevention interventions targeting the country's highest-risk populations.

Download at syngs.info/dptoolkit.

Report: Funding from a Place of Trust

As underscored by the Covid-19 health crisis, the value of flexible funding for strengthening nonprofits and powering their vital work is increasingly clear. Yet too many funders still hesitate to act on this information.

In 2020 Synergos issued the report *Funding from a Place of Trust: Exploring the value of general operating support and capacity building grants*, commissioned by the Citi Foundation. The report offers a sound starting place for any foundation, philanthropist, or impact investor who wants to better understand the benefits of flexible funding and the vital considerations for doing it well. At its center is the essential concept of a trust-based relationship.

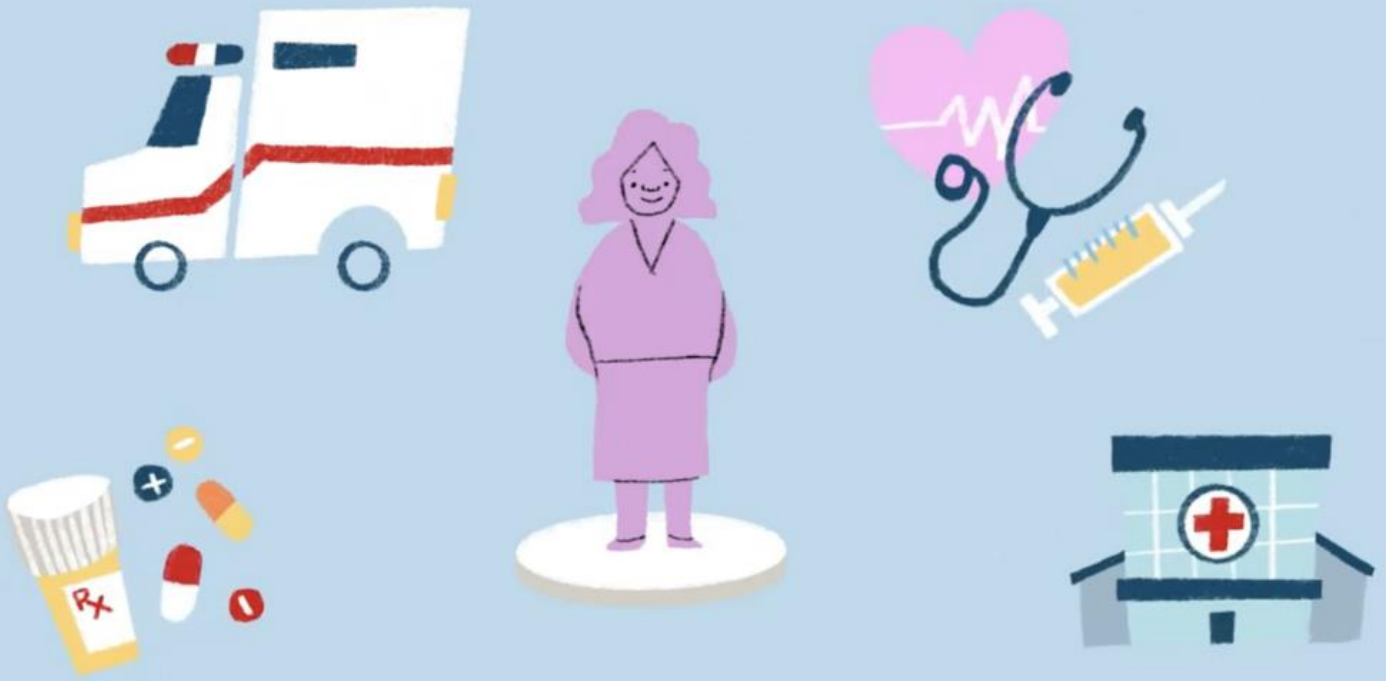
The report launch webinar shared highlights of the research, together with remarks from funders and grantees who are leading the way in utilizing general operating support and capacity building. Additional online events to discuss the report were held for the Brazil, Middle East and Africa region, Latin America, and Asia/Pacific.

Case Studies on Inner Work for Social Change

Three years ago, Synergos and the Fetzer Institute launched a partnership to cultivate a new, more reflective form of leadership, recognizing that the systemic challenges we face require a more participatory form of leadership, one that empowers people at all levels of society to effect real change together. Solutions to humanity's deeply rooted problems necessitate unprecedented levels of collaboration across political, social, ethnic, economic, and other divisions. And collective action at scale starts with leaders who are self-aware, humble, and empathetic.

The two organizations launched the Inner Work for Social Change Project to advance a global conversation around the centrality of reflective practices for more effective social action. The project aims to strengthen the case for inner work, sharing tools and insights from thought leaders and practitioners, and to guide more social changemakers across sectors to incorporate self-reflection into their own work.

Within the project, inner work is broadly understood as any form of deliberate and ongoing reflective practice that increases awareness of self, others, and the systems in which complex social problems arise. More specifically, it is any reflective practice that enables an individual or group to connect to a deeper sense of purpose, strengthen relationships, and become a more effective agent of social change.



Through the partnership, Synergos has documented inner work insights, practices, and tools from our own partnership building experiences across the world since our inception. Central to this study is the publication of six case studies across Synergos-led projects in six different countries, along with an extensive cross-case analysis.

In 2020, Synergos and its partners co-hosted a four-part series of online convenings and panel discussions to explore learnings from the case studies, discuss the applications of inner work for social change, and build the case for its use. The gatherings marked the public launch of the project and started Synergos' Bridging Leadership community of practice—an active collective of changemakers from various sectors across the world who are enhancing and learning to apply their bridging leadership skills—including inner work. To facilitate a larger global conversation on Inner Work for Social Change, Synergos also launched an interactive storytelling platform to introduce new audiences to the topic through inspiring stories of transformation.

Learn more at innerworkforsocialchange.org.

