**Documentary Photography Project (DPP)**

**Portfolio Review, July 1, 2014**

**Summary**

**Topic:** Production Grant to Photographers from Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Pakistan (CAC Production Grant)

**Participants**: **Presenter**  **Anna Overstrom-Coleman***,* *Program Coordinator, DPP*

**Responders**  **Chris Stone**, *President*

**Akwe Amosu**, *Regional Director, Africa*

**Moderator** **Amy Yenkin**, *Director, DPP*  
**Rapporteur** **Siobhan Riordan**, *Exhibition Associate, DPP*

**Discussants** **Vicki Litvinov**, *Regional Grantmaking Manager, Eurasia Program*

**Jessica Murray**, *DPP Consultant /* *Co-founder & Director, Al-liquindoi Workshops*

**Daphne Panayotatos**, *Program Coordinator, Strategy Unit*

**Caitlin Pierce**, *Open Society Presidential Fellow*

**Anthony Richter**, *Assoc. Director; Regional Director, Pakistan/Afghanistan, MENA*

**Daniel Sershen**, *Associate Director of Strategy, Results Assessment*

**Annick Shen**, *Senior Communications Coordinator, DPP/Communications*

**Ivan Sigal**, *Board Chair, DPP*

**Yukiko Yamagata**, *Associate Director, DPP*

**Topic**

From 2009-2014, the CAC Production Grant (a DPP and Arts and Culture Program partnership) funded 37 photographers from Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Pakistan. Although our specific commitment to the CAC region has ended, there are elements of this program that could inform our current and future work. In the portfolio review, we aimed to address the following questions: 1) How effective has DPP been in supporting photographers in the region?; 2) What were the key challenges, how did we address them, and what solutions could we have explored but didn’t?; 3) With the CAC Production Grant ending, how can our experience inform where and how we support local photographers in the future?

**Discussion**

Portfolio review participants raised many important questions that ranged in scope, from those that addressed our decision-making on an individual level—or in specific situations or contexts—and others that addressed our assumptions more broadly. There were questions and discussion on 1) the role of mentors; 2) whether social media was effective in building communities and what other efforts we tried; 3) what we could have done differently in Pakistan; 4) how individuals harness the power of organizations through the creation of collectives and whether this is a model we should be supporting; and 5) our desire to demonstrate impact on specific issues documented and whether this was a necessary goal.

Overall, we found the discussion to be incredibly useful in identifying decision points where we could have explored other options. The review also provided an opportunity to question our own goals and assumptions, for the CAC Production Grant as well as for DPP’s broader work.

We spent time going over the program’s design, including the role of mentors and our approach to building networks and community. We also discussed our strategy and approach for outreach and partnerships within each country, concluding that we should have spent more time and effort familiarizing ourselves with local realities and developing a tailored strategy in each country for working with not only Open Society offices, but also external local partners.

The majority of the conversation was focused on our goals and expectations going into the program in terms of what we expected to result from the supported projects. As discussed in the paper, we entered the program with two primary goals in mind: 1) to strengthen the capacity of local photographers to document issues of concern to the foundation; and 2) to advance the issues addressed in the supported projects. DPP acknowledged in the paper and the presentation that the second goal was unrealistic and therefore failed. In the discussion, portfolio review participants challenged this conclusion. Rather, they encouraged us to focus on local capacity building and supporting the field as valid goals in and of themselves, and to let go of the idea that projects/grantees should be evaluated on their impact on the issue itself. It was clear that while the issue of impact was being considered in the context of the CAC Production Grant, the discussion had far reaching implications for our work.

**Main Takeaways**

The main takeaways from the discussion include:

* **Theory of change**: we should begin by developing our own sense of what photography can do in the world and use this as a filter to determine where and how to work, and under what conditions
* **Impact**:our focus should not be on the extent to which a project drives change on a specific issue – this is the role of local actors (our grantees) on the ground
* **Capacity building**: this in and of itself is a valid goal, as long as we are supporting socially engaged artists
* **Context and local outreach**: we need to spend more time and resources understanding local contexts—and the rapidly changing media ecology—and developing and engaging local partners beyond OSF
* **Networks**: networks cannot be forced and should develop organically