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Crossing the digital divide or stuck at the border?

Posted on 10 August 2011 by [Filiz Bikmen](#)



Filiz Bikmen

'Since 2002, 204,525 donors like you have given \$48,623,013 to 4,256 projects. Wonderful!' This is the message that appears at the top of the [globalgiving.org](#) website (as of 28 July 2011).

I commend globalgiving and other similar platforms, many of which are US-based, in their ability to mobilize the power of the internet to help charities and donors cross the digital divide. Needless to say, I was both pleased and frustrated to learn that globalgiving planned a visit with Turkish charities earlier this summer. *Pleased* because it offers charities the opportunity to

showcase their good work and raise funds from donors all over the world... *frustrated* because Turkey still lacks any sort of similar mechanism – on or off line. Given this scenario, should we focus our efforts on helping Turkish charities cross that digital divide and join the global fundraising movement or focus more on building similar systems at the national and local level? Or both?

Our late and esteemed colleague Olga Alexeeva ([A suggestion to improve fundraising in emerging markets: just a technical issue](#), 27 July 2011) just recently touched on similar issues regarding the pros and cons of fundraising and, in general, ways to make (giving, and) repeat giving easy and accessible in emerging countries. I could not agree more. Bearing great resemblance to Russia, there are practically no credible channels to recruit donors for one time or regular/repeat donations to charities in Turkey. Worse yet, there is no CAF office or any CAF-like organization whose sole mission it is to increase the amount and effectiveness of giving in Turkey. At best there are a handful of charities running limited time fundraising campaigns and a growing cohort of charities which are appreciative but tired of having the EU as their only donor, and are keen to diversify. There have been attempts made in good faith to address this gap, but the honest truth is that we are not very far from where we started. The gap between charities and donors remains.

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As such, I was quite curious to learn what globalgiving Field Representatives Shahd AlShehail and Isabel Nicholson would uncover in their meetings with Turkish charities in three cities (Istanbul, Izmir and Diyarbakir) earlier this summer. Both were kind enough to respond to my questions about how charities reacted to globalgiving and online fundraising in general.

They reported regional differences in terms of organizational capacity and English language ability – not surprising and clearly serious deterrents for using globalgiving (and accessing other foreign funds). Yet they also had the impression that ‘Turkey is at the forefront in terms of using social media to engage donors and spread a message’. Having entered that ‘world’ through some programmes I am involved in, I can attest to the explosion of social movements via social media. However admirable it is, these movement are more so about raising consciousness, not money.

Another finding was that most charities expressed a lack of clarity and a degree of frustration about fundraising laws. ‘Public’ fundraising activities (collecting online donations, raising funds through portals, or any other public campaign) continue to require bureaucratically confusing and complicated procedures and permissions at the national level. And while receipt or foreign funds is no longer subject to permission, each donation must be filed with public officials before use. No easy feat if you’re collecting 10 USD at a time! While several years back, the Turkish government improved the charity law, there is still more to do to making giving easy and accessible.

In her post, Olga proposes that this is a ‘technical’ problem, and that we need to ‘decrease’ the asking price of donations. The factors that increase the asking price in Turkey include cumbersome policies/procedures, lack of centralized systems, donor services, fundraising skills and the burden of foreign language requirements – quite similar to most emerging market countries.

While it is not globalgiving’s mandate to decrease the ‘asking price’ per se, for charities in contexts like Turkey, perhaps they could help us both build capacity of charities to join their networks while also sharing their know-how to help build similar local mechanisms.

Note from the author: I would like to dedicate this piece to the memory of Olga Alexeeva whose vision and pursuit inspired me. May she rest in peace knowing that we are all continuing to help make her visions a reality.

This post has been cross-posted at [Turkish Philanthropy Funds’ blog](#).



This entry was posted in [Opinion](#) and tagged [Fundraising laws](#), [Globalgiving](#), [Online giving](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

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