



Interview with Walter Kerr and Amanda Arch (Unlock Aid)

Ashley Hopkinson

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Ashley Hopkinson: Can you please introduce yourselves and tell me more about the problem that Unlock Aid set out to solve, and how are you actively working to solve that problem?

Amanda Arch: Hi, Ashley. I'm Amanda Arch, the co-executive director of Unlock Aid.

Walter Kerr: I'm Walter Kerr, co-executive director of Unlock Aid. Unlock Aid is a coalition of social enterprises and other social innovators solving some of the world's hardest problems. The challenge that we're taking on is that there is a lot of funding that is flowing into official development assistance, global development for really important, complicated problems like climate change, global health security, food insecurity. The list goes on. That's funding that could be used to scale up the most effective, proven, replicable solutions to some of these challenges. The problem is there's a big disconnect between where that funding is going and who is ultimately able to access it.

The reality is that in spite of the fact that the global community spends more than \$200 billion a year on global development priorities, the United States being the largest funder by far spending more than \$55 billion every year, there are a handful of largely Washington, DC based government contractors that are taking home around nine out of every \$10 that the United States is spending through its foreign assistance expenditures. So there's not a lot foreign about foreign aid. What we're trying to do is to bridge the divide to help ensure that resources that are supposed to be going to solve these problems are actually able to get to the social entrepreneurs on the front lines who would be able to scale their impact in really unprecedented ways if only we were able to fix this issue.

Amanda Arch: Unlock Aid started as a research project and as organizations getting together to discuss a lot of the challenges and blockers from being able to meaningfully work in this space. Through the 70+ interviews at the time that Walter and others, the individual Unlock Aid co-founding group, did to better understand this, a white paper was put out documenting that, and then nine of the organizations decided to come together to form the initial coalition. I think that's a



unique moment in the Unlock Aid origin story, going from the learning and the research to let's take action and actually pull together to become a political advocacy group or political coalition to be able to advocate for direct change.

Ashley Hopkinson: What would you say makes Unlock Aid distinctive in this space of social change?

Walter Kerr: Well, there's no one that's really driving advocacy and systems change, thinking about how do we change at least US government funding, the largest funder of these systems, really quite like Unlock Aid is. You'll have organizations that will go out and talk about the need to increase funding for a given priority, but there's not often organizations that are out there talking about, "Okay, well, to whom and to what ends and why are we doing this? And is this funding actually responsive to what countries want and need, what communities want and need?"

Unlock Aid, as a coalition of the doers of the organizations that are really on the front lines, has an intimate understanding of the challenges that they're seeing and the resources that they need to scale their impact. I think that we serve as this credible bridge builder that is really taking on public funding around driving solutions for some of the planet's hardest problems in a way that there's really not any other kind of organization doing it.

Ashley Hopkinson: How would you say Unlock Aid measures success? How do you know that what you're doing is working toward the progress that you set out?

Amanda Arch: Well, speaking for myself, having an entrepreneurial background where there are some of those more tangible metrics in terms of revenue or engagement that you could be looking at, I think policy change takes time. I think that's something that as entrepreneurs ourselves in the space we're trying to be very mindful of are what are those ways that we look at signals and certain proof points along the way that we're making shifts. I think there's an element of the things like putting new legislation forth and having legislation passed, but then also looking at what are core operating metrics within the agency that we want to see the USAID, the agency that we're most focused on, and shifting these resources of things that they can be doing differently in terms of structuring their contracts, their grants to be more effective and more aligned with social innovators' needs. I'll let Walter talk about some of those key stats that we've seen shift in the last two years.

Walter Kerr: At the beginning, Amanda mentioned this research project. Unlock Aid started as a research project where we didn't know that this was going to blossom into becoming a political coalition that was going to organize for change. It really started off as just a series of interviews among ourselves, among social enterprises and social innovators asking, "When you try to work with a public funder, how do you do it? What are the barriers you experience? How do you



overcome them? Are there things that other organizations can learn from?" In the process, the conversations are very therapeutic, talking about how hard it was to access public funding. But as Amanda mentioned earlier, that's when people said, "Well, what if we actually got together and tried to change some of these rules that are inhibiting us from having impact?"

When we think about the main themes that came up that prohibited or inhibited organizations from being able to access funding, there were really four flavors of problems. One, just procurement and accessing funding. There's too much red tape. Complexity benefits the powerful and the entrenched that have access to resources and understanding of the networks. The red tape and complexity around government grants and contracts are just too complicated.

Two, almost as a function of that, the only way in the door is as a subcontractor to this larger group of known legacy government contractors. That is a losing proposition often for most social enterprises because too often we hear that they're promised the world from the bigger companies in order to win government grants and contracts only to later get cut out of work later on.

Three, often we would hear stories where social enterprises, social innovators were able to access small pots of funding for a pilot program, for example, or to test out an idea. Even when it proved to be successful, there is no pathway to scale what works. There was money for pilots, nothing for scale up.

Four, just the type of projects that we are funding in global development are actually often not responsive to the needs of communities and countries. There often is not even an opportunity to even apply for funding. Even if the rules were brought down, even if there was less red tape, often we're not funding priorities that are actually responsive to what countries are actually needing, wanting, demanding.

If you start from those four flavors of problems, for each of those we have a set of specific policy actions that we want to see changed that would fundamentally change the way that organizations are then able to access funding. There's kind of intermediary goals of success of are we actually seeing policy changes related to each of those four buckets of problems, and then there's the longer term shift of are we actually seeing funding shift to new ways to these organizations that are on the front lines, and by extension then are we actually seeing a measurable improved impact for billions of people around the world.

Ashley Hopkinson: Could you share an example that illustrates the impact of your work?

Walter Kerr: One of the things that we've been talking a lot about is this idea that organizations are able to access small pots of funding for \$100,000 or \$250,000 to test an idea or to do some with an early stage replication of an idea, but often there's a blocker. Because innovation



programs, units that are designed to work with social enterprises, tend to be disconnected from the larger operations of the rest of the way that a large federal agency that's managing \$30 billion works. So you have these small little \$30 million units that are disconnected in many ways from the \$30 billion operation. That's one of the reasons why we have this problem. One of the things that we've been really focused on over the last year though is how to actually bridge that divide. We've worked with Congress to try to increase funding for that unit specifically to work with more social enterprises on the front end, and then have also worked with Congress to direct USA to create a pathway to scale so that as the solutions that are coming out of those early stage programs prove to be cost-effective, replicable, scalable, that they have to identify a way by which to dedicate more resources to bring those solutions to scale.

We've seen concrete examples of organizations both inside of our coalition and outside that are starting to see a lot more of that scale up money than we had seen in the past. Just last month, an organization called Maisha Meds based in Kenya received a multimillion dollar scale up grant from USAID to expand the number of people they're able to serve through their digital pharmacy model, for example. But there's dozens of examples like that. And this is one of those areas where I think we're going to see even more attention focused in the coming weeks, months, and years. There's legislation to actually codify this into law that the agency needs to do this in a more regular, systematic way. This can't be just the experience of one administration. This needs to live on and fundamentally change the way that we do global development. Period.

Then the other thing I'll say is we talk a lot about the flavor of funding. **If we are sending out funding that you have to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in these expensive financial management systems, HR systems, just to manage a single government grant, it kind of diminishes the appeal of even getting this funding in the first place. The government doesn't have to put money out the door that way. They can move to more milestone-based, deliverables-based grants and contracts where the red tape is actually significantly lower, but we're actually having more accountability because we have to show, "Did you have impact or not?"** We've seen the USAID increase the percentage of the kinds of awards that they're sending out the door that way, about 50% this year over last year. When you talk to social entrepreneurs that are receiving these kinds of grants, they will tell you it's day and night difference in terms of how nice it is to work with the US government to be able to scale their impact.

Ashley Hopkinson: What teachable insights has this work given you that you might be able to pass on to someone who is wanting to do coalition bridge building type work and creating connections and unlocking solutions that make it easier for other people?

Amanda Arch: That is a good question. I think that coming from more of the traditional entrepreneur, building a social enterprise to building a coalition, I think that this has been a really



special and meaningful experience in terms of being able to do this in community in terms of really deeply understanding all of the needs of a certain group of organizations and people at a certain time, and how you really get to the core of what are the things that everyone agrees on and you can build energy around and kind of build momentum to come together and to do the change. The work to get to product market, if you will, of the solutions in terms of how you navigate a very diverse group of people and geographies and solutions and all of those things and kind of get people moving forward on something that can be agreed to, I think it's a similar funnel to work through the solution to get to the change. It's just a different way of going about it.

I guess the insight would be that instead of deeply understanding your customer in terms of what it is people are buying from you, there's deeply understanding the unique challenges, opportunities, fears and concerns, and kind of understanding the equilibrium of that across the coalition. Where, as the people doing the day-to-day work, you can find that sweet spot where the agreement is and where we can move forward. I think it's been really interesting for me building in this kind of modality for change and on how you scale that, grow it, and continue to find that equilibrium as you build.

Ashley Hopkinson: Yeah, I think that's significant. Walter, what about you? I think it's especially fascinating that it started as research. What advice would you give to someone that might want to take it beyond the white paper?

Walter Kerr: I think there are three things. The first is that the white paper is in some ways representative of the idea that you need to have a source of truth. You need to understand your "why" at a very intimate cellular level because when we go in and talk about these issues or bring our coalition partners to Washington, DC to go talk to lawmakers or folks in government, there is a very clear through line between what we are talking about, about the kind of policy change we need and why those are the issues that we've chosen to talk about, because they were born out of these conversations where people were talking about their frustrations. **There's nothing about our policy platform, the things that we're working on, that were birthed by academics sitting in ivory towers imagining what a better system could look like. They were really driven out of direct response to what the community said they needed to be successful. I think that the first is just there's something about being authentic about the policy things that you want to be asking for, that there needs to be a very clear link to this is what people actually want, need, say they want, because I think too often policy makers are disconnected from the doers.** People in the business of making policy imagine what they think the right answer might be. Maybe they read an economics paper when they were in grad school or they met with a think tank or something, but there's a real disconnect from the actual people on the ground solving the problems. I think that's the first is it's important to have that connection and really intimate understanding of what the challenges are.



I think the second and third are both interrelated. The second is that you have to paint a vision for where you want to go over the next five years, ten years. What would an actual different world look like? That is what inspires people. It gets people wanting to sign up, raise their hand. It's what gets funders excited. You need the inspirational message of what a different model, what a different system could look like. The third part though is that you also need to understand what are the short-term intermediary steps that a policymaker right now can take. The reality is that most people go into public service because they want to do good. We might have different perspectives depending on our orientation about what that end result is, but I think most people still go into public service out of this idea of serving others. For an issue like ours where we don't really get tangled up in the issues of how much money should be spent for that, how much money should be spent for this. We do actually get to meet with a lot of policymakers of different political orientations who really want to help, but they don't know how. They say, "Well, what can we do?" I think the third thing really gets at this idea of you do have to figure out kind of, well, what are some of the specifics of things that you can actually show up on a piece of paper and say, "If you did this very specific thing in the next six months, that would have a really big impact." There's a really tricky balancing act of both putting out the big vision for what a big shift can look like and then also saying, "And until we get there, here's some very specific things that would make a meaningful difference right now."

Ashley Hopkinson: Every social innovator is going to learn things from what didn't work as much as you learn from what did work. Can you share something that you implemented or that you tried that didn't work, and what lesson that taught you, ideally something someone else can learn from?

Walter Kerr: When you think about the scale of the problem that we're trying to take on, it's a quarter of a trillion dollars a year problem. It's a lot of money. When you think in those terms, you're kind of like, "Wow, everybody should be excited about this and everybody should be invested in trying to change this system." I think that one of the areas where we've struggled, I'm not willing to call it a failure quite yet because I think we're still tinkering with the model, but I think explaining the value proposition to organizations of why they should get invested in this, get involved in this, has been challenging for certain kinds of groups that we kind of think like, "Well, why aren't they at the table here? Why aren't they getting more involved?"

A few examples. When you think about when we're trying to create new markets, trying to help entrepreneurs in low middle income countries have more impact, naturally I think, "Well, shouldn't investors care about that if we could create a better market environment for the kinds of portfolio companies they could be investing in? Isn't that something that they should care about?" Similarly, a lot of multinationals are investing a lot of money in emerging markets. Wouldn't it be better for them if this global development money was spent more effectively? It's an area where I think that



we will have conversations with a lot of bigger companies and with investors. Often they'll shake their head and say, "Yes, we agree this is important, but when we look at our list of priorities, this is lower on the list of things that we care a lot about. And we're going to be spending the bulk of our attention and effort on all of these other issues that matter a lot more."

I think that over time, we have gotten better at trying to connect the dots of finding the organizations in those kinds of categories that should be invested in this. Where we have not been successful in the past is where I don't think we've done enough thinking about what is the real value proposition about why this organization should be invested in this initiative's success. I think it's really a message about sales. It's really a message about communication, about marketing. For certain kinds of customers that you'd want to bring into our coalition, they require a slightly different kind of message. What we're really trying to do is build a political coalition around a really big restructuring of the US and global approach to global development. We're going to need a really big political coalition to support that. That includes not just social enterprises, but includes diaspora communities, includes investors, includes multinationals that are investing in these countries around the world. I think one of the areas where we're still working on is for some of these market segments, these segments of the political coalition, what is the message that they need to hear to really get excited about supporting a big shift.

Amanda Arch: I think it's been really interesting to me how much this discussion and the media around foreign aid is so DC focused. This feels like a very DC conversation where a lot of people are talking to each other. As we think about "why isn't foreign aid..." There's a lot of reasons why as we broaden the conversation around global development and foreign aid reform and build out that next layer of engagement and constituency, meeting people where they're at and getting a better understanding of how they think about this issue, how does it meet their top priorities. We're talking about a very specific part of the US foreign aid budget, which is around global development, not so much in terms of our crisis response. I think especially as you get out into the broader public, people's awareness of these things may be one sentence that they're hearing in the media versus this very nuanced conversation that's happening in DC. I think the area that Walter's saying is, I call it layering the cake, is it's like there's kind of this foundational thing we need to do and then we have to build out to this next audience layer of policy things that make sense for what they're thinking about, and then kind of how to do the narrative hook there.

Another way that shows up for us is, I think we've been very successful in more DC based media publications getting our work out there, but in terms of how you would translate this into a more mainstream story in the Washington Post or The New York Times or other more regional publications nationally and across the world. I think that's where that will show when we're successful is we have the policy, the problems, we're speaking the right language to kind of get into these broader publications about our work.



Walter Kerr: An area for growth that I think is related to everything Amanda just said, is a follow on to kind of my first thing. One constituency, one group that should be, but has not been more involved with this issue, is philanthropy. If you think about the universe of social enterprises, unless they have come up with an entirely market-based approach where people in that economy are paying out of their own wallets to pay for something and keeping it alive, most social enterprises are receiving some funding from philanthropy. And unless we actually get public funders to step in and bring to scale the most effective social enterprises among those that philanthropy has often de-risked and proven the model, philanthropy will be on the hook indefinitely to keep these organizations afloat.

If you could think about a type of or a category of group that should be at the table in a much bigger way than they are right now, it is philanthropy because otherwise social enterprises will remain indefinitely dependent on philanthropy. We have to figure out a way to bridge the divide where once a solution proves to be highly effective, the public sector is able to participate in funding that solution at scale. We've had some great philanthropic partners that have supported our work, but there is so much more that's out there, so many more philanthropies that really need to step up, come to Washington, talk about the impact the organizations they support are having every day, and help lawmakers understand that there's actually a very different way of doing global development that does not rely on a handful of DC-based contractors. We actually could change the way that we do this in a really big, impactful, more sustainable way. Philanthropy has enormous resources, influence, but to-date, I think that we have yet to really crack the nut on how to activate more foundations to get involved with advocacy around this.

Ashley Hopkinson: Aside from making sure you have sufficient funding, what would you say are the other challenges that you're facing in the space and how are you working to overcome those?

Amanda Arch: These are real-time questions. I think that so much of Unlock Aid has kind of happened as a research project then as this initial group of coalition members willing to get together. There's definitely been this snowballing effect of kind of just continuing to have resonance with more and more people that I think there's been moments. Right now as we're thinking about this final year of the current term of the Biden-Harris administration, how can we maximize our impact? What would it look like to be in a term in the next presidential cycle? I think so much of our current orientation is around what I would say is the political furniture in DC today. You know? We have an administrator at Samantha Power at USAID who is very focused on reform. There's certain elements in Congress right now in terms of this issue being very bipartisan to be able to have momentum in that space. Thinking about what happens when things shift is something that we're focused on right now.



I think in terms of scale, that's something that there's an element of, "if we had 70 social innovators in our coalition today and we have 500 tomorrow, what would that scale look like?" Perhaps going from more internationally focused to also thinking about challenges domestic social innovators are facing in terms of being able to access certain public funds that there might be similarities. There was an article recently about how frontline organizations were having challenges accessing Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding to be able to maximize their impact domestically. I think that that's an interesting area to look at.

We just submitted comments to the White House Office of Management and Budget, the OMB, to talk about challenges with federal grantmaking writ large across all federal agencies. I think that's something, going from USAID to other agencies. More than that, I think there's this elevation of this issue of procurement reform challenges and how we can continue to broaden that out and have that as a known issue moving forward that administrations are focused on. It's kind of outlasting one specific administration or one specific group. How do we elevate this? So the conversation where the Overton window has really shifted politically, this is something that is just getting a lot more airtime and there's many more groups focused on the core things that we're thinking about. But Walter, I'd love your additional thoughts.

Walter Kerr: Well, what's been challenging? I would say that when we are successful, it's when people don't even know what Unlock Aid is. It's because the narrative has shifted so much that there's just an understanding that we need to change the way the government works. The conversation cannot be a reductive one to what is the right amount of funding, but we also need to be focused on how we are funding this money, to what ends, to whom.

When I think about what's been challenging, there's a lot of groups in the global development ecosystem that will go to lawmakers or policymakers and talk about the importance of global health investments or the importance of food security assistance. What's missing from their advocacy often is the mechanics of how we're funding this money. Until we can make that shift, these very weedy issues that add complexity to the way that the federal government works will continue to perpetuate inequities, will continue to ensure that those that already have power continue to have power, those that do not have access to funding will continue not to have access to funding. I think the biggest challenge is actually helping the broader ecosystem of all the people that are trying to do really good in the world to understand that it's not enough to talk about how much we are funding. We also have to talk about who and to what end.

Amanda's point earlier about the domestic agencies, it's interesting because what we're talking about is as much about good government as it is about global development. When I talked about those four challenges that social enterprises said they felt. Red tape around complexity of applying for government funding, getting some early money for pilots but not being able to scale,



dependency on subcontracting, getting taken advantage of by the handful of management consultants and government contractors. You could swap out USAID for almost any other federal government agency because these are challenges about the way that the US government works both in the domestic space as well as in the international space. I think that's actually an exciting opportunity though, because, as Amanda just mentioned, we worked on the submission of this report that we sent to the White House. We saw input on it from groups that were working on global challenges as well as domestic challenges. I think there's an opportunity here in this challenge to build an even broader coalition around this idea of what would it look like to just modernize the way that the government functions, period, so there's more response to what communities want, need, and so that we're able to get resources directly to organizations on the front lines of having impact.

Ashley Hopkinson: Would you view it as an asset that you're working across aisles and working across sectors?

Amanda Arch: Absolutely, yes. One of the most energizing moments that I personally had in terms of our advocacy on The Hill, for example, is when you have a meeting with a Congressperson and there's a large multinational global organization paired up with a nonprofit organization operating in one country in Africa. The fact that they both are having the same challenges in terms of being able to work with the US government, I think, speaks volumes to this cross cutting issue where I think people can immediately say yes to it. "Okay, I see this."

Being able to showcase global health across energy, across water, even across from USAID to another federal agency makes people understand this isn't just one realm or one sector that's facing the problems. I think it's easier for people to understand and they can see those through lines across a lot of different ways, because I think sometimes when it is one sector or one agency, there can be all these specific reasons why it's happening here. But the more that it is crosscut and across many different types of organizations and issue areas, I think it's much harder to ignore those underlying drivers.

Walter Kerr: This is one of the handful of issues in Washington where we can actually still get Republicans and Democrats to work together, this idea that the question of the mechanics of government of how is funding flowing. One of the most eye-opening moments for me last year was when during a budget hearing with Samantha Power, an extremely conservative member of the House Republican caucus, Samantha Power asked a question about diversifying funding streams, making sure that more money is able to get to non-traditional underrepresented partners. It was immediately followed by an extremely progressive member of the Democratic caucus who asked almost an identical question, showing that there's real resonance for this idea that we need to get funding out of Washington, DC and we need to actually reach communities.



We need to bring down barriers to entry. This is an issue that resonates with a lot of different groups and folks here even in Washington, DC amid all the partisan rancor.

Ashley Hopkinson: I want to talk about systems change. This is the world Unlock Aid lives in. You guys are systems change. Can you speak more specifically to how you feel like you're working towards systems change when it comes to funding?

Walter Kerr: I think there's some element about policy change that is very important, I think maybe even more important as we go into an election year where there's going to be even less attention on what bills can pass. People are going to go into campaign mode. People are going to move out of Washington. There's not going to be as much space for new policy changes.

The other part of this equation that's very important is around narrative shift. One of the lasting contributions that those who were involved in the grand bargain many years ago where organizations came together and said that at a baseline, at a minimum, not a target, at a cap, but at a minimum, at least 25% of global development funding needs to be going to local organizations. That changed the debate. We saw when Samantha Power came in as the head of USAID, that she said that that was her overarching objective as administrator. That is a function of narrative shift. That is because people came and they said, "This is the right thing to do." You can see how years later that then ends up affecting policy change.

Similarly, Amanda has talked a lot about advocates in the climate movement and the creation of the Green New Deal. It's shifting the narrative around the kinds of solutions that we need so that when it came time years later to passing the IRA, there were a lot of components that made it into it that might not have otherwise been there if not for some of the advocacy around shifting the narrative around the scale of the solutions that we need around climate.

When I think about what our contribution can be in the next year around systems change, yes, policy is important, but the other part of this is just saying that the current approach to global development is inadequate to meeting the scale of the needs of the 21st century. We need a much more responsive, agile system that meets and is responsive to the needs of communities, and shifting the narrative, helping to understand that there are thousands of organizations having an impact every day ready to receive this funding, ready to scale their impact. Countries want new models. There's a way to both do good and do well here. I think that we have a really big opportunity around narrative shift that will have, over the long run, an even bigger impact on changing policy.

Amanda Arch: I would just love to add to that. Being able to take what we discussed about not more money, but how the money flows, the resource allocation, who are the people who make the most sense to do that. What are the conversations we're having about, if it's having the impact



that was initially desired on various things and the common goals outlined by that. I think that there's going to be something in terms of the change that we have to do. How do we make that conversation not overly weedy, certainly not overly partisan. **There's some threading the needle to kind of modernize the conversation about this. Especially, I think, leveraging social media, leveraging a lot of the really exciting Gen Z organizing tactics. Taking this very complicated thing and putting it into a 30-second Instagram Live or a TikTok or whatever it is to be able to synthesize it and make it engaging. Helping people understand and want to share it.** "I can see how this is affecting other issues I care about like climate change and why this kind of procurement reform aspect needs to be included in those conversations moving forward."

Ashley Hopkinson: I feel like here at the bottom line we're talking about aid and how to distribute it in a more functional way to where it gets to places that it needs.

Walter Kerr: I would say even at a layer even deeper than that. We're talking about public funding. Period. Of which the way that we do our foreign assistance funding is one subset, but there are analogies to the problems we're talking about at FEMA, there are analogies that we're talking about at the way the Department of Transportation works, the way the Department of Interior works. This is about the government functioning better and being more responsive to communities. Period. I think we've taken this on from one particular lens, but the lessons that we're, I think, learning here, we've already started to apply more broadly to, well, how do we rethink the role of US federal agencies? Period.

Ashley Hopkinson: That clarification is good. I like that. It's across the board. What would you say you need from other people? There are other actors or partners in this space to help to move this forward?

Walter Kerr: I think the first that I'll say is that when you think about the variety of communities that are impacted, that have a stake here, and then you look at who Washington, DC typically consults, the two are not the same. When you think about the incredible amounts of diaspora communities here in the United States that show up, that vote, but have a very direct connection to their home countries, we need to be doing a better job of working with them, with those communities, reaching out to the variety of diaspora constituencies in the United States and helping to involve them in these conversations.

When you think about big companies that are making big investments in countries around the world, they've largely been absent from the discussions about how their funding, and how can public funding be more catalytic towards helping social enterprises, social innovators scale their impact. We need to do a better job of bringing them into the conversation. You could map out kind of a list of a variety of constituencies that actually have stakes, but we need to do a better job as a



coalition of connecting all of these different communities so that we can all have more collective power in terms of how we are bringing these issues to policymakers.

I think one thing that we would say is just we want to involve you, engage you kind of no matter where your orientation background is in this. We want to help connect different groups that are interested in different aspects of this challenge. We're ready for people to raise their hands. Many of these organizations, communities, constituencies do a lot of direct advocacy on kind of individual thematic specific things, but we're talking about broader change that we need to affect. We'll be stronger if we all come together and talk about these issues as a community as opposed to talking about our specific narrow sectoral and geographic lenses.

Amanda Arch: I think that something that kept me up at night for many years in advance of meeting Walter and founding or being part of Unlock Aid was that when you think about, for example, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and these things that all of these countries, so many majority of countries around the world have signed on to, so many multinationals have, they have a deadline of 2030. We're kind of at the half point right now.

When I think of that, specifically as Walter said, at these multinationals, I think there's these hard conversations we need to have about how we're aligning all the money that's been pledged and then saying, "Okay, how is that money being deployed?" Because we're in 2025. If that money hasn't been deployed, that needs to happen. But then that gets into this conversation of how it's going to be deployed. How. And how are we going to have hard conversations about if the funding is getting the outcomes and goals that were outlined when the Sustainable Development Goals were created many years ago?

What I'd love to see more from the community too is more advocacy around the urgency of an understanding of these resources, what they're doing. I think that this is where social innovators are meant to have their kind of moment. If we're off track on some of these goals, if we're not hitting the objectives that were outlined, that's the moment for innovation and change to happen. I think by having a deadline where all of these communities are coming together to look at these resources and their impact, that's where we can be really honest about where we need to be looking at new solutions and new ways of doing things. Those types of goals are an amazing reason to come together and really look at this "how" question differently and where I think the social innovator community is specifically well positioned to be able to maximize their impact in this next half of the decade.

Ashley Hopkinson: Where do you see Unlock Aid in the next five years?

Amanda Arch: I think these are not theoretical exercises at this point. We can and should do this because we should always be looking at how money is spent and is it getting the best impact that



it could be having in terms of just taxpayer effectiveness of dollars. I think that the context of our work is in the fact that this is a consequential decade because of the climate crisis, because of the pandemics that we've been having, because of humanitarian crises and migration worldwide. There's a real moment where we need to better understand how public institutions are going to be set up to be successful and address these challenges.

I think five years from now I would want to see that this issue, as Walter alluded to earlier, that we're able to push this mainstream conversation away from acting like there's a crisis happening in how public funding is being spent. That's kind of understood. We're able to get bipartisan support in Congress, potentially pass some major legislation in this space to codify some of these changes. Resources are starting to shift.

Right now, we're more in the implementation phase, I would say. I'd like to be in a place where it doesn't have to feel like we're educating, but we can pass that phase. We're in implementation now. We can discuss details like, "Okay, what were the unintended consequences of some of the changes? How can we continue to tweak and to make it better in terms of the pace needed to achieve some of these goals?"

Walter Kerr: It's very similar theme, which is to say that if what keeps you up at night is the idea that your local community substance abuse clinic is not able to obtain the resources it needs to meet the growing demands in the community, or if your community is not able to respond to water cleanliness or sanitation issues in the way that it needs to and is constantly fighting for resources, unable to access those resources that they need, or if you care about the way that we spend billions of dollars every year to address challenges like climate change, both in the United States and globally, at the root of the root is around questions of government effectiveness, our resources reaching communities, can communities access those resources.

I hope that over the next five years, what will happen is this conversation evolves beyond feeling like this is just any one particular sector's problem, and this is actually just about modernizing the way that our public institutions function to meet the scale of the challenges of this century. So what that means in practice is that we'll have been successful in terms of transforming the way that US global development agencies work, yes, but it also means that we'll have done a better job of linking up with the disparate efforts of groups working on different parts of these problems to work as one coalition, as community, talking about how we need to transform government writ large.

Ashley Hopkinson: Yeah, that was excellent. Thank you.



Ashley Hopkinson is an award-winning journalist, newsroom entrepreneur and leader dedicated to excellent storytelling and mission-driven media. She currently manages the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of the Solutions Journalism Network. She is based in New Orleans, Louisiana.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*